

Construction of Islamic Identity Through Arabic Language Learning in the Salafi Community of Kendari City

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ABSTRACT

This study is grounded in the importance of Arabic language learning as a medium for constructing Islamic identity within Salafi communities, where language functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a marker of religious ideology and cultural belonging. The purpose of this study is to examine how Arabic learning practices contribute to the construction of Islamic identity in the Salafi community of Kendari City through the perspective of Manhaj Salaf culture. The partners involved in this study are members of the Salafi community, including religious teachers (ustadz), halaqah participants, and learners engaged in non-formal Arabic learning activities. This study employs a qualitative approach with a cultural-phenomenological design, utilizing observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation as data collection methods. The findings reveal that Arabic language learning in the Salafi community is systematically integrated with doctrinal values, serving as a means of internalizing Salafi religious identity, strengthening ideological commitment, and differentiating communal religious expressions. Arabic is positioned as both a sacred language and a symbol of authenticity in practicing Islam according to the Salaf manhaj. These results highlight the strategic role of Arabic learning in reinforcing religious identity and cultural continuity within Salafi communities, underscoring the importance of language-based religious education in sustaining ideological coherence and communal solidarity.

Keywords: Islamic Identity, Arabic Learning, Salafi Community, Manhaj Salaf, Religious Culture

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in the construction of religious identity, particularly within communities that emphasize doctrinal purity and ideological continuity (Aditya et al., 2025). Within Islamic civilization, Arabic occupies a unique and elevated position because it is intrinsically connected to the primary sources of Islam, namely the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'an explicitly states:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ “Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may understand.” (QS. Yusuf [12]: 2).

According to classical exegetes such as Ibn Kathir, this verse indicates that the selection of Arabic as the language of revelation is not accidental but serves as a means for clarity, comprehension, and preservation of divine guidance. In his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Ibn Kathir explains that Arabic was chosen because it was the most eloquent language capable of conveying profound theological meanings with precision. Similarly, Al-Qurtubi emphasizes that the Arabic language became the medium through which Islamic teachings were transmitted authentically across generations. Therefore, mastering Arabic is often perceived by Muslim communities not only as a linguistic skill but also as a pathway to understanding religious texts directly from their original sources.

Within Salafi communities, this theological orientation toward Arabic becomes even more pronounced. The Salafi movement emphasizes a return to the understanding and practices of the early Muslim generations (*al-salaf al-salih*), which includes engaging with Islamic texts in their original language. This orientation aligns with the prophetic tradition narrated by Muhammad:

خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ “The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it.” (HR. Bukhari no. 5027).

Scholars interpret this hadith as an encouragement not only to memorize the Qur'an but also to understand it properly, which inevitably requires engagement with the Arabic language. In Salafi intellectual discourse, Arabic mastery is frequently associated with *ittibā'* (adherence to the prophetic tradition), *tasfiyah* (purification of religious understanding), and *tarbiyah* (religious cultivation). Consequently, Arabic learning becomes an integral component of religious devotion and identity formation within Salafi communities. In Islamic contexts, Arabic occupies a unique position not only as a liturgical language but also as a symbolic medium that represents theological authority, epistemic legitimacy, and religious authenticity (Ghufron et al., 2025).

In the Salafi community of Kendari City, Arabic learning functions beyond pedagogical purposes and emerges as a cultural practice embedded in everyday religious life. Arabic expressions, terminologies, and textual references are frequently used in sermons, study circles (*halaqah*), and daily communication among community members. These practices reinforce the perception that Arabic is not merely a foreign language but a sacred linguistic medium that connects believers to the authentic teachings of Islam. This phenomenon resonates with another Qur'anic affirmation:

“And indeed, it is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart so that you may be among the warners, in a clear Arabic language.” (QS. Ash-Shu‘ara [26]: 192–195).

According to Al-Tabari, the phrase “*bi-lisanin ‘arabiyyin mubin*” (in a clear Arabic language) signifies that the language of revelation was chosen to ensure clarity and accessibility for its first audience while preserving the authenticity of divine messages. Within contemporary Salafi discourse, this verse is frequently cited to emphasize the importance of engaging directly with Arabic sources rather than relying solely on translations or secondary interpretations. Thus, Arabic learning becomes a means of maintaining doctrinal authenticity and religious authority (Nasution et al., 2025).

Despite its centrality, the role of Arabic learning in constructing Islamic identity within local Salafi communities remains underexplored, particularly from a cultural perspective. Recent studies on Arabic language learning have largely focused on formal educational institutions, pedagogical strategies, curriculum development, and learner motivation. Research in Indonesia highlights Arabic as an instrument for strengthening religious literacy and moral education within schools and Islamic boarding institutions (Jurnal & Bahasa, 2025). Internationally, studies often frame Arabic as a marker of Islamic identity among Muslim minorities and transnational religious movements. Meanwhile, research on Salafi communities tends to examine ideological orientations, patterns of da‘wah, and socio-religious dynamics, often portraying Salafism as a theological or political phenomenon rather than as a cultural-linguistic practice (Maharani, 2025). In Indonesian contexts, studies on Salafi communities frequently focus on contestations of religious authority, educational institutions, and doctrinal transmission. However, relatively few scholars explore how everyday linguistic practices contribute to shaping collective identity within these communities (Afandi et al., 2025).

Although some scholars acknowledge the importance of Arabic mastery within Salafi circles, most studies treat language merely as an instrumental skill, not as a cultural mechanism of identity construction. Few studies analyze Arabic learning as a lived cultural practice that embodies Manhaj Salaf values, such as *ittibā‘* (strict adherence to the salaf), *tasfiyah* (purification of belief), and *tarbiyah* (religious cultivation). Moreover, existing research rarely situates Arabic learning within localized Salafi communities outside major Islamic centers, leaving regional contexts such as Kendari underrepresented in academic discourse (Siregar & Edukasia, 2025). This indicates a theoretical and empirical gap in understanding how Arabic learning operates as a cultural strategy for sustaining Salafi identity at the community level.

Based on this gap, this study asserts its originality by positioning Arabic language learning as a cultural practice that actively constructs Islamic identity within the Salafi community of Kendari City through the framework of Manhaj Salaf. Unlike previous studies that emphasize pedagogy or ideology separately, this research integrates linguistic practice, cultural meaning, and religious methodology into a single analytical framework. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on Arabic learning as an identity-forming process embedded in everyday

religious life, rather than as a formal educational activity alone. This perspective is crucial for understanding how Salafi communities maintain ideological coherence, religious authenticity, and communal boundaries in contemporary Muslim societies.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the forms and patterns of Arabic learning practices within the Salafi community of Kendari City; (2) to analyze how these practices contribute to the construction of Islamic identity; and (3) to explore the role of Manhaj Salaf as a cultural framework shaping language use and religious expression. Through these objectives, the study seeks to reveal the deeper socio-cultural meanings of Arabic learning within Salafi life.

The expected outcome of this study is to provide a nuanced understanding of Arabic language learning as a cultural and ideological process that reinforces Islamic identity in Salafi communities. Scientifically, this study contributes to the fields of Arabic language education, Islamic studies, and religious anthropology by offering an interdisciplinary perspective that bridges language, culture, and ideology. Practically, the findings are expected to inform educators, researchers, and religious practitioners about the strategic role of language in shaping religious identity, particularly within ideologically driven communities. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of viewing Arabic learning not merely as linguistic competence, but as a cultural-religious practice that sustains identity, continuity, and meaning in contemporary Islamic communities.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research approach designed to explore and understand social phenomena related to Arabic language learning and the construction of Islamic identity within the Salafi community of Kendari City. Qualitative research is most appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to examine human behavior, beliefs, and cultural practices in their natural context, emphasizing depth of understanding rather than numerical measurement or generalization. Such an approach is particularly suitable when investigating *meaning, experience, and cultural practices* that cannot be fully captured through quantitative metrics alone (*naturalistic, interpretative, and contextual dimensions*) (Ananda et al., 2025)

This study adopts ethnographic research design, a specific type of qualitative methodology used to explore cultural practices and lived experiences of a community. Ethnography involves extended engagement and observation of participants within their natural environment to produce a rich, holistic understanding of social life. In this study, ethnography enables the researcher to interact deeply with members of the Salafi community, observe language learning practices firsthand, and document how these practices contribute to identity construction (*holistic and multi-perspective data collection*) (Sari et al., 2023). Cultural-anthropological perspectives of ethnography recognize that language practices are embedded within broader belief systems and social interactions that shape community norms and religious life. This makes ethnography particularly effective for exploring the intersection of language learning, culture, and religiosity in community settings.

The choice of ethnography is supported by recent religious studies research, which uses ethnographic methods to understand cultural and theological practices within Muslim communities, permitting researchers to see religious life from participants perspectives rather than only through textual analysis or external observation. To clarify the research procedure, this study follows several systematic stages beginning with the identification of the research focus and the selection of a qualitative ethnographic design. The research was conducted within the Salafi community of Kendari City as the primary research site. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of learning activities and community practices. The collected data were analyzed through stages of data reduction, categorization, and thematic interpretation to identify patterns related to Arabic language learning and Islamic identity construction. To ensure the credibility of the findings, triangulation of sources and methods was applied. The overall research process is illustrated in Figure 1.

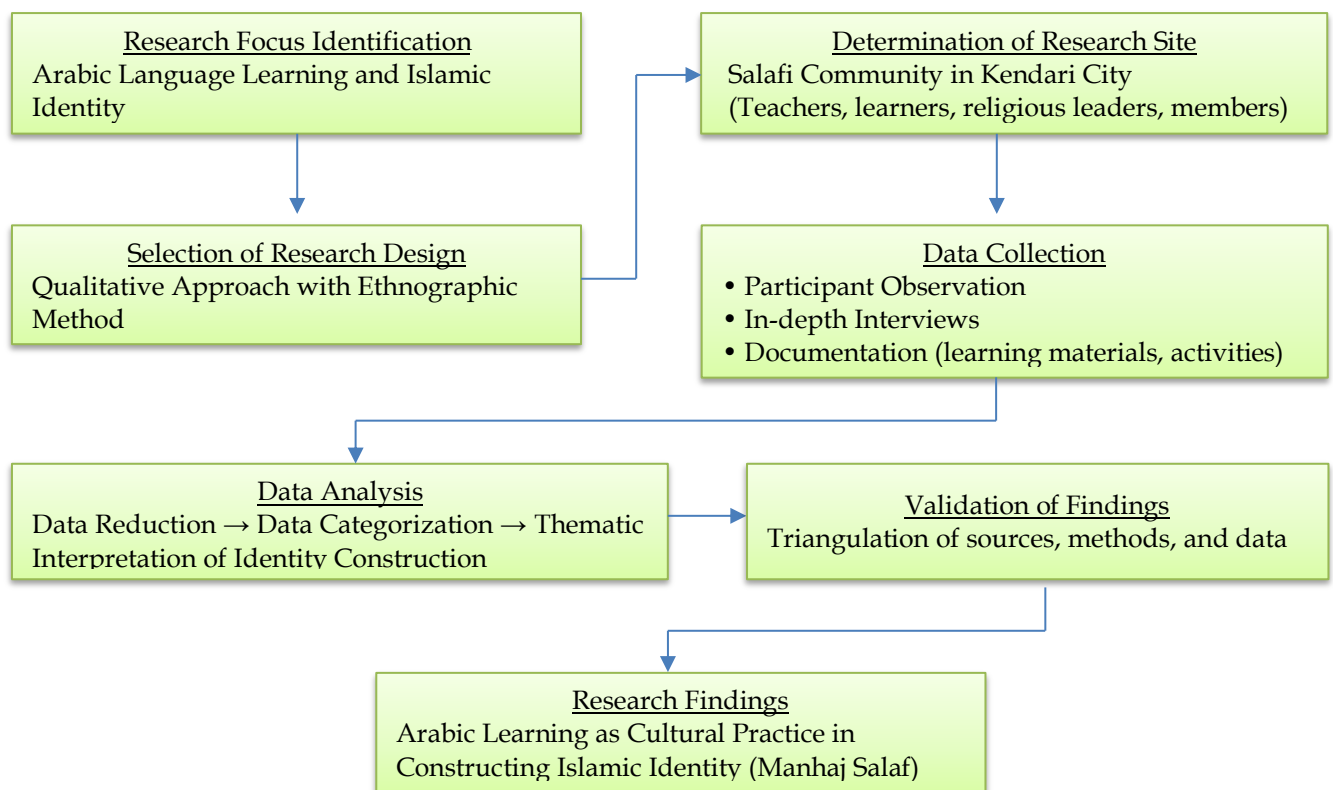


Figure 1. Research Procedure of Ethnographic Study

Ethnographic research procedure used to examine Arabic language learning practices and Islamic identity construction within the Salafi community of Kendari City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This section presents the main findings of the study based on field observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis conducted within the Salafi community of Kendari City. The findings reveal that Arabic language learning functions not merely as a pedagogical activity but as a central cultural mechanism for constructing Islamic identity grounded in *Manhaj Salaf* values.

This section elaborates the empirical findings of the study derived from systematic field observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis conducted within the Salafi community of Kendari City. The results demonstrate that Arabic language learning in this community transcends conventional pedagogical functions and operates as a central cultural mechanism for constructing, sustaining, and legitimizing Islamic identity rooted in *Manhaj Salaf*. Rather than being perceived merely as a linguistic competence, Arabic is positioned as an epistemological gateway, an ideological marker, and a symbolic resource through which religious authenticity and doctrinal purity are negotiated and affirmed. This perspective is clearly reflected in participants' narratives. As one informant stated: "If we don't understand Arabic, we're just following along. But if we do, we can draw directly from the Quran and Hadith to avoid misinterpretation." (Interview, Participant A). The discussion that follows situates these findings within broader sociolinguistic, anthropological, and religious education frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Forms and Patterns of Arabic Language Learning in the Salafi Community

The findings reveal that Arabic language learning in the Salafi community is predominantly conducted through non-formal and semi-formal religious settings, including *halaqah ilmiyyah*, Qur'anic study circles, and thematic religious lectures. These learning spaces function not only as educational arenas but also as sites of ideological reproduction where religious knowledge, values, and identities are continuously transmitted. Field observations confirm this pattern. During a *halaqah* session, the researcher noted that: "A number of teachers or *ustadz* consistently read Arabic texts using the classical model, accompanied by explanations in Indonesian or their translations, and the participants repeated the key words in Arabic simultaneously." (Field Notes, FN-02). Unlike formal educational institutions that rely on standardized curricula and structured language instruction, Arabic learning in these contexts emerges organically through sustained engagement with religious texts and communal worship practices. This pattern reflects the Salafi community's preference for experiential, text-centered learning that prioritizes direct engagement with authoritative sources over institutionalized pedagogical models (Mukminin & Hanun, 2025).

These learning spaces function as central arenas for religious transmission, where language learning is embedded within routine worship and doctrinal instruction. Rather than being organized as formal language classes with standardized syllabi, Arabic learning emerges organically through sustained participation in religious activities, reflecting the community's preference for experiential and text-centered modes of learning (Chaplin, 2018).

Within these non-formal settings, Arabic instruction is inseparable from religious content. Learners encounter Arabic primarily through the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Salafi texts, positioning the language as the medium of divine revelation and legitimate religious knowledge. Consequently, Arabic is not approached as an abstract linguistic system governed by communicative goals, but as a sacred language whose mastery is intrinsically linked to spiritual correctness and doctrinal accuracy. This orientation shapes learning priorities, emphasizing textual comprehension, terminological precision, and fidelity to original sources rather than conversational fluency or modern linguistic competence. Arabic learning is therefore framed as a religious obligation rather than an academic endeavor, reinforcing its moral and spiritual significance. This view is strongly articulated by participants. One respondent explained: "Learning Arabic isn't just about academics, but also about preserving our religion. If we don't learn, we can misunderstand religion." (Interview, Participant B) (Sriyono et al., 2026).

In these settings, Arabic instruction is not separated from religious content, but is integrated directly into the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Salafi texts. Learners engage with Arabic primarily as the language of revelation and authoritative knowledge, rather than as an abstract linguistic system. This orientation shapes the learning process, prioritizing comprehension of sacred texts and doctrinal accuracy over communicative fluency or modern language competencies. As a result, Arabic learning is perceived less as an academic pursuit and more as a religious obligation tied to spiritual correctness (Rosikh, 2025).

Arabic learning within the Salafi community emphasizes vocabulary, grammatical structures, and expressions that are frequently used in Salafi discourse. Particular attention is given to key religious terminologies that carry strong theological meanings, such as concepts related to creed (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), and religious methodology (*manhaj*). These linguistic elements are repeatedly reinforced during lessons, sermons, and informal discussions, allowing learners to internalize both the language and the ideological framework it conveys (Hila & Harlek, 2023). Repeated exposure to these terms across lessons, sermons, and informal discussions enables learners to internalize not only the language itself but also the worldview embedded within it. As one participant explained: "Terms like *manhaj* and *bid'ah* are always repeated, so gradually we can understand their meaning and how to use them." (Interview, Participant C). Through this process, linguistic acquisition becomes a mechanism for ideological socialization, ensuring that learners adopt the interpretive frameworks that define Salafi religious understanding (Hattab et al., 2023).

Pedagogically, instruction is characterized by the consistent use of Arabic terminology, even when explanations are delivered in Indonesian. This practice produces a bilingual learning environment in which Arabic occupies a privileged symbolic position as the language of authority, while Indonesian functions as a supportive explanatory medium. Such an arrangement gradually normalizes Arabic as an indispensable component of religious communication and fosters linguistic intimacy with sacred texts. Over time, habitual exposure cultivates familiarity with Salafi linguistic patterns, reinforcing the perception that authentic

Islamic knowledge is inextricably tied to Arabic proficiency. This finding aligns with broader sociolinguistic perspectives that highlight how sustained exposure and ritualized language use facilitate internalization and symbolic elevation of particular languages (Ramadhan & Syahru, 2024).

Moreover, habitual engagement with Arabic in religious learning contexts reinforces its function as a symbol of legitimacy and authority. Even basic mastery such as the ability to recognize, pronounce, and appropriately deploy key Arabic terms is associated with enhanced religious credibility and perceived proximity to the original sources of Islam. This view is evident in societal customs. One participant noted: "If someone can read the scriptures and use Arabic terms correctly, they usually feel more confident in explaining religion." (Interview, Participant D). Within the Salafi community, linguistic competence becomes a visible indicator of commitment to the Manhaj Salaf and seriousness in religious practice. Language thus operates as a semiotic resource through which religious alignment and moral standing are publicly displayed and socially evaluated.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Arabic language learning in the Salafi community constitutes a culturally embedded and ideologically charged practice. Through non-formal learning environments, text-centered instruction, and the consistent privileging of Arabic terminology, language learning functions as a means of sustaining religious authority, reinforcing collective identity, and ensuring continuity of Salafi values. This model highlights the inseparability of language, belief, and culture in the construction of Islamic identity within Salafi communities. Arabic functions as a symbolic boundary marker. A number of participants explicitly felt this difference: "Usually we can understand whether someone is a Salafi from the way they communicate, especially the Arabic terms they use." (Interview, Participant E). (Hikam et al., 2025).

Instruction is consistently delivered using Arabic terms, even when explanations are provided in Indonesian. This pedagogical practice creates a bilingual instructional environment in which Arabic retains a privileged status as the primary language of religious authority. The repeated use of Arabic expressions familiarizes learners with the linguistic patterns of Salafi discourse and gradually normalizes Arabic as an essential component of religious communication. Over time, this exposure cultivates a sense of linguistic intimacy with religious texts and reinforces the perception of Arabic as indispensable to authentic Islamic understanding. Things are in accordance with the statement that the consistent use of Arabic terms in instructional environments fosters a bilingual learning context where Arabic retains a privileged status and becomes internalized through habitual exposure (Maf et al., 2025).

Moreover, habitual exposure to Arabic in religious learning settings reinforces its symbolic function as the language of legitimacy and authority. Mastery, even at a basic level, is associated with increased religious credibility and perceived closeness to the textual sources of Islam. Within the Salafi community, the ability to recognize, pronounce, and utilize Arabic terms correctly becomes an indicator of one's commitment to the Salafi manhaj and seriousness in religious

practice. Language, therefore, operates as a visible marker of religious alignment and identity (Fuadah et al., 2025).

Overall, these findings demonstrate that Arabic language learning in the Salafi community is not merely a pedagogical process but a cultural and ideological practice. Through non-formal learning environments, text centered instruction, and consistent use of Arabic terminology, language learning becomes a means of sustaining religious authority, shaping collective identity, and reinforcing adherence to Salafi values (Yahya et al., 2016). This model of learning highlights the inseparability of language, belief, and culture in the construction of Islamic identity within Salafi communities.

Tabel 1. Forms of Arabic Language Learning in the Salafi Community

No.	Learning Form	Characteristics	Identity Implication
1.	Halaqah Kitab	Text-based, Arabic centered	Reinforces textual authority
2.	Qur'anic Study	Literal comprehension emphasis	Strengthens scriptural identity
3.	Religious Lectures	Frequent Arabic terminologies	Symbolic identity marking

The table shows that Arabic learning is embedded in religious routines and daily practices, making language acquisition inseparable from religious socialization.

Arabic Language as a Marker of Islamic Identity

The findings further demonstrate that Arabic language usage functions as a symbolic boundary marker that distinguishes Salafi identity from other Muslim groups (Aziz et al., 2020). Within the Salafi community, language is not a neutral medium but a cultural sign system that conveys affiliation, doctrinal orientation, and religious positioning. The selective and consistent use of Arabic terminology creates a linguistic boundary that both unites members internally and differentiates them from broader Muslim publics who may rely primarily on vernacular religious expressions (Movement, 2022). The selective and consistent use of Arabic terminology establishes a clear linguistic boundary that differentiates Salafi adherents from broader Muslim publics who may rely more heavily on vernacular religious expressions. This boundary-making process reinforces internal cohesion by creating a shared linguistic repertoire that signals mutual belonging and shared religious commitments. At the same time, it functions externally as a distinguishing feature that separates Salafi identity from other Islamic traditions perceived as less textually grounded or doctrinally rigorous. Through this mechanism, Arabic becomes a tool of inclusion and exclusion, shaping both communal solidarity and intergroup differentiation.

Furthermore, Arabic terminology within Salafi discourse is not value-neutral but carries evaluative and normative meanings that structure religious understanding. Terms commonly employed in Salafi settings often encapsulate specific theological judgments, implicitly categorizing beliefs and practices as legitimate or deviant. As such, language becomes a medium through which doctrinal boundaries are continuously reinforced and negotiated. The repeated circulation of these terms in sermons, lessons, and everyday interactions

normalizes Salafi interpretive frameworks and embeds them within the collective consciousness of the community (Qalam & Keagamaan, 2025).

Importantly, the use of Arabic as a symbolic boundary marker also reflects broader processes of identity construction through symbolic interaction. By adopting and reproducing specific linguistic forms, community members actively participate in the maintenance of Salafi identity. Even limited proficiency in Arabic can function as a powerful social signal, indicating commitment to Salafi values and alignment with its epistemological foundations. In this sense, Arabic usage operates less as a measure of linguistic competence and more as an indicator of ideological belonging and moral positioning within the religious field (Khamdan, 2024). Overall, these findings underscore that Arabic language usage in the Salafi community functions as a strategic cultural resource in the construction and preservation of religious identity. By serving as a symbolic boundary, Arabic not only unites members internally but also delineates Salafi identity in relation to other Muslim groups. This highlights the central role of language in shaping religious boundaries, sustaining ideological coherence, and legitimizing authority, confirming that identity formation within Salafi communities is inseparable from everyday linguistic practices (Dzukroni & Aziz, 2023).

Participants consistently associated mastery of Arabic with religious correctness, authentic understanding of Islam, and closeness to the practices of the *salaf al-salih*. Arabic is perceived as the key to accessing original religious sources without interpretive mediation, thereby ensuring doctrinal purity. This perception elevates Arabic from a functional language to a symbolic resource that legitimizes religious knowledge and authority within the community (Azmi & Nuraeni, 2025). This understanding elevates Arabic from a functional means of communication to a symbolic resource that legitimizes religious knowledge and authority within the Salafi community. Those who demonstrate familiarity with Arabic particularly in religious contexts are often perceived as possessing greater epistemic credibility and closer alignment with authentic Islamic teachings. The authority to interpret texts, lead religious discussions, or provide doctrinal clarification is implicitly tied to one's perceived proximity to the original Arabic sources. In this sense, Arabic functions as a form of symbolic capital that structures hierarchies of knowledge and authority, reinforcing the idea that true religious understanding is attainable only through direct engagement with the language of revelation (Hudzaifah, 2023).

Moreover, this perception has important implications for identity formation and community cohesion. Arabic mastery becomes a visible indicator of commitment to Salafi ideals, signaling seriousness in religious practice and loyalty to the Manhaj Salaf. Even limited competence in Arabic can carry significant symbolic weight, as it reflects an intentional effort to align oneself with the epistemological foundations of Salafi Islam. Through this process, Arabic operates simultaneously as a marker of religious authenticity, a source of moral legitimacy, and a mechanism for reinforcing collective identity. These findings underscore that within the Salafi community, religious authority and identity are constructed not only through belief and practice but also through sustained linguistic engagement with Arabic as the language of sacred knowledge (Azizah et al., 2025).

Arabic expressions such as *bid'ah*, *manhaj*, *ittibā'*, and *dalil shahih* operate not merely as linguistic tools but as ideological signifiers embedded with evaluative meanings. These terms function as markers of religious judgment, signaling what is considered acceptable or deviant within Salafi discourse. As observed in daily interaction: "When expressing opinions in a discussion, participants often say 'that is *bid'ah*' or 'it is not in accordance with the *manhaj*', as a form of assessment of certain customs." (Field Note, FN-05). Their frequent use in teaching, sermons, and everyday conversation reinforces a shared interpretive framework that governs religious understanding and practice (Maharani, 2025).

The frequent circulation of these expressions in teaching sessions, sermons, and everyday interactions reinforces a shared interpretive framework that governs religious understanding and practice within the Salafi community. Through repeated exposure, these terms become internalized as cognitive and moral reference points, guiding individual religious behavior and collective norms. This habitual linguistic practice not only strengthens communal cohesion but also reproduces Salafi ideological boundaries across time and social contexts. Consequently, Arabic terminology functions as a form of discursive discipline, shaping how religious knowledge is interpreted, evaluated, and enacted. These findings highlight that within Salafi communities, ideological continuity and identity maintenance are sustained not only through doctrinal instruction but through everyday linguistic practices that embed evaluative meanings into routine religious life.

Importantly, Arabic proficiency is widely perceived as an indicator of an individual's seriousness in practicing Islam. Community members often interpret even basic familiarity with Arabic terminology as evidence of commitment to learning Islam from its authentic sources. This perception reduces the emphasis on fluency or grammatical perfection, placing greater value on symbolic alignment with Salafi religious ideals (Sheikh, 2022). Even limited competence in Arabic is thus socially meaningful, as it reflects adherence to Salafi religious orientation rather than linguistic achievement per se. The ability to appropriately use key Arabic terms in religious contexts signals one's participation in the Salafi moral and ideological order. Through this process, Arabic functions as a marker of belonging and religious credibility, shaping social recognition within the community (Mubarak & Octriana, 2025).

Overall, these findings underscore that Arabic language use in the Salafi community transcends communicative purposes and becomes a central element in identity construction. By operating as a symbolic boundary, Arabic reinforces collective cohesion, delineates ideological distinctions, and sustains the Salafi worldview. This confirms that language plays a pivotal role in religious identity formation, functioning simultaneously as a medium of meaning, a symbol of authority, and a marker of communal belonging (Khasanah, 2024). By functioning as a symbolic boundary, Arabic reinforces collective cohesion among Salafi adherents while simultaneously delineating ideological distinctions from other Muslim groups. Shared familiarity with Arabic terms and expressions generates a sense of in-group belonging and mutual recognition, strengthening communal solidarity. At the same time, this linguistic boundary operates as a marker of

difference, distinguishing Salafi identity from religious traditions that rely more heavily on vernacular expressions or alternative interpretive approaches. In this way, Arabic mediates processes of inclusion and exclusion, enabling the Salafi community to maintain a distinct and coherent identity within a plural Islamic environment (Naska, 2024).

Furthermore, Arabic sustains the Salafi worldview by operating as a symbol of epistemic authority and religious legitimacy. Proximity to Arabic particularly as the language of revelation and classical scholarship is widely perceived as a prerequisite for sound religious understanding. This perception elevates Arabic to a privileged status in the hierarchy of knowledge, where access to and engagement with the language becomes a key source of credibility. Religious authority is thus closely tied to linguistic capital, as individuals who demonstrate familiarity with Arabic are more readily recognized as legitimate bearers and interpreters of authentic Islamic knowledge (Azis et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings confirm that language plays a pivotal role in religious identity formation by functioning simultaneously as a medium of meaning, a symbol of authority, and a marker of communal belonging. Arabic serves as a unifying cultural resource that aligns belief, practice, and ideology into a cohesive framework, ensuring continuity of Salafi values across contexts and generations. This study therefore contributes to broader discussions on language and religion by demonstrating that identity in Salafi communities is not constructed solely through doctrinal commitment, but through sustained linguistic practices that embody and reproduce religious worldviews in everyday life.

Internalization of Manhaj Salaf through Language Practices

Another significant result is that Arabic learning facilitates the internalization of Manhaj Salaf as a lived culture. Language learning is framed as part of religious obedience (*ta'abbudi*), not merely intellectual development. Participants expressed that learning Arabic is a means of safeguarding faith, avoiding misinterpretation, and maintaining purity of religious understanding. Participants illustrated this as a spiritual process: "Learning Arabic is like a form of worship, not just learning the language, but also a way of getting closer to the Sunnah." (Interview, Participant F). Arabic learning thus functions as a cultural mechanism through which Salafi values such as textual literalism, rejection of innovation (*bid'ah*), and strict adherence to early Islamic sources are transmitted and preserved across generations. The findings confirm that Arabic language learning within the Salafi community of Kendari City operates as a cultural practice that actively constructs Islamic identity, rather than as a neutral educational activity. This supports sociolinguistic perspectives that view language as a central element in identity formation and group differentiation (Meliani et al., 2023).

The perception of Arabic as a protective mechanism against misinterpretation reflects a deep epistemological concern within the Salafi worldview. This concern is reflected in participant narratives: "Sometimes translation is not enough, we have to see the original language directly to avoid misunderstandings." (Interview, Participant G). Reliance on translations or secondary interpretations is often regarded as insufficient or potentially

misleading, reinforcing the belief that direct engagement with Arabic sources is necessary for maintaining the purity of religious understanding. Consequently, Arabic learning is valued not for communicative proficiency but for its function in preserving doctrinal accuracy and textual authenticity. This orientation shapes learning practices that emphasize close reading, terminological precision, and adherence to classical interpretations aligned with the understanding of the *salaf al-salih* (Widodo, 2025). Through this process, Arabic learning functions as a cultural mechanism through which core Salafi values such as textual literalism, rejection of religious innovation (*bid'ah*), and strict adherence to early Islamic sources are transmitted and reproduced across generations. Language becomes the medium through which these values are normalized and sustained in everyday religious life. The habitual use of Arabic terms and expressions reinforces a shared interpretive framework that governs how religious knowledge is understood, evaluated, and enacted. As such, Arabic learning contributes not only to individual religious formation but also to the maintenance of collective ideological continuity (Right, 2021).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study move beyond a descriptive understanding of Arabic language learning as a religious or pedagogical activity by situating it within broader sociolinguistic and anthropological frameworks that conceptualize language as a form of symbolic power. Rather than functioning merely as a communicative tool, Arabic in the Salafi community operates as a form of *symbolic capital* that mediates access to religious authority, legitimacy, and authenticity. This aligns with Bourdieu's theory, which posits that linguistic competence in a socially valued language variety confers not only communicative ability but also social recognition and power. In the context of the Salafi community of Kendari City, Arabic proficiency is not simply an academic skill but a socially constructed resource that signals epistemic credibility and alignment with authoritative religious knowledge (Muthoifin & Elbanna, 2025).

This study further demonstrates that the symbolic capital associated with Arabic is not institutionalized through formal educational structures but is instead enacted and reproduced through everyday religious practices. Authority emerges through demonstrated engagement with Arabic texts and the appropriate use of religious terminology, reflecting a decentralized yet socially regulated system of knowledge validation. This finding extends previous research by showing that linguistic capital in Salafi contexts operates within a lived religious field, where legitimacy is continuously negotiated through practice rather than conferred solely through formal credentials (Yahya et al., 2020). From the perspective of habitus, Arabic language learning in the Salafi community can be understood as an embodied process through which individuals internalize not only linguistic forms but also cognitive and moral dispositions aligned with the Manhaj Salaf (Nasri & Mulyohadi, 2023). The repeated exposure to Arabic within non-formal religious settings such as halaqah and study circles contributes to the formation of durable dispositions that shape how individuals interpret religious texts, evaluate practices, and position themselves within the broader Islamic landscape. Language

learning, therefore, becomes inseparable from processes of socialization, where linguistic competence is intertwined with the cultivation of religious sensibilities and disciplined modes of thought (Indrasanti & Wita, 2023).

The findings also highlight the role of Arabic within the framework of language ideology, where linguistic forms are imbued with cultural, moral, and epistemological meanings. In this context, Arabic does not merely reflect Salafi identity but actively constructs it by encoding distinctions between what is considered authentic and deviant religious practice. The consistent use of specific Arabic terminologies embeds evaluative judgments within everyday discourse, transforming language into a mechanism through which doctrinal boundaries are reproduced and normalized. This supports the view that language is not only a medium of communication but also a site of ideological production (Sultan & Hassanudin, 2026). Moreover, the use of Arabic terminology can be interpreted through Social Identity Theory as a form of in-group categorization that reinforces communal cohesion while maintaining symbolic boundaries with other Muslim groups. Shared linguistic practices generate a sense of belonging and mutual recognition among Salafi adherents, while simultaneously differentiating them from alternative religious traditions. However, this boundary-making process is not neutral; it is closely tied to power relations, as the authority to define legitimate language use also entails the authority to define legitimate religious knowledge and practice (Mohammad Ramli, 2024).

A further layer of analysis can be drawn from a Foucauldian perspective on discourse and power. The privileging of Arabic as the language of religious truth functions as a form of discursive regulation, shaping what can be said, how it can be interpreted, and who is authorized to speak within the religious domain. Control over Arabic linguistic forms becomes a means of regulating access to religious knowledge, thereby reinforcing structures of authority within the community. In this sense, Arabic operates not only as a symbolic resource but also as a disciplinary mechanism that governs religious interpretation and practice (Thabrani & Salaam, 2025). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study offers a significant contribution to the literature by conceptualizing Arabic language learning as a form of *Manhaj-based cultural praxis*. Unlike previous studies that tend to separate language learning from ideological formation, this research demonstrates that language, belief, and culture are deeply intertwined in a unified process of identity construction. Arabic learning is not merely a tool for accessing religious knowledge but a central mechanism through which Salafi ideology is embodied, enacted, and reproduced in everyday life (Derg & Dergisi, 2026).

This conceptualization provides a novel analytical framework for understanding the role of language in religious communities, particularly within contemporary Salafi contexts. It shifts the focus from language as a passive medium of transmission to language as an active agent in the production of meaning, authority, and identity. In doing so, the study fills an important gap in existing scholarship, which has often emphasized theological or political dimensions of Salafi movements while overlooking the cultural-linguistic processes that sustain them (Turg & Komilovna, 2025). Overall, this study underscores the need to incorporate sociolinguistic and cultural perspectives into

the analysis of Islamic education and religious identity (Fadillah et al., 2025). By demonstrating how Arabic language learning functions simultaneously as symbolic capital, embodied habitus, and discursive power, the findings reveal that identity formation in the Salafi community is not solely rooted in doctrinal adherence but is continuously constructed through structured linguistic practices embedded in everyday religious life. This perspective not only enriches theoretical discussions on language and religion but also opens new avenues for examining the intersection of language, ideology, and power in diverse Islamic contexts (Ali, 2006).

This study introduces a novel perspective by conceptualizing Arabic language learning as a form of *Manhaj-based cultural praxis*, where language functions simultaneously as symbolic capital, embodied habitus, and discursive power. Unlike previous studies that examine Arabic pedagogy or Salafi ideology in isolation, this research demonstrates that language is the primary medium through which religious identity, authority, and authenticity are constructed and reproduced in everyday life. This integrative approach provides a new analytical lens for understanding the intersection of language, religion, and power in contemporary Islamic communities. Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of sociolinguistics and Islamic education by extending Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, Foucault's theory of discourse and power, and language ideology frameworks into the context of Salafi religious practice. It demonstrates that language operates not only as a communicative system but as a central mechanism of ideological embodiment and identity construction. By situating Arabic learning within lived religious experience, this study offers a culturally grounded model that highlights the role of language in mediating the relationship between belief, practice, and authority in contemporary Islamic societies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Arabic language learning within the Salafi community of Kendari City plays a central role in constructing Islamic identity through culturally embedded practices grounded in *Manhaj Salaf*. Arabic is not positioned merely as a linguistic competence but functions as a symbolic and ideological medium that shapes religious understanding, behavior, and collective belonging. Through non-formal learning settings such as *halaqah ilmiyyah* and Qur'anic study circles, Arabic learning becomes an integral part of religious socialization, reinforcing the community's commitment to textual authenticity and doctrinal purity. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that Arabic language practices serve as identity markers that differentiate the Salafi community from other Islamic groups. The consistent use of Arabic terminologies and expressions reflects a form of symbolic boundary making that strengthens internal cohesion while affirming adherence to the salaf oriented worldview. In this context, Arabic functions as a cultural instrument through which Salafi values such as strict textualism, rejection of religious innovation, and obedience to early Islamic sources are internalized and transmitted across generations. From a scientific perspective, this study contributes to the interdisciplinary fields of Arabic language education, Islamic studies, and cultural sociology by offering a novel understanding of

language learning as a form of religious cultural praxis. By integrating linguistic practice with ideological and cultural analysis, this research highlights the importance of viewing Arabic learning not only as pedagogy but as a dynamic process of identity construction within contemporary Islamic communities. These conclusions suggest that future studies should further explore language-based religious identity formation in other socio-religious contexts to enrich comparative and theoretical insights.

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