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Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity: The Role of the Arabic Language in Islamic Culture, Religious Thought, and Language Learning

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Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping students' moral and social values, yet their capacity to foster tolerance amid rising intolerance in high schools remains underexplored. This study investigates tolerance content in official PAI textbooks published by the Ministry of Education and Culture under the Merdeka and 2013 Curricula. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the research analyzes a purposive corpus of six PAI textbooks (Teacher's and Student's books for Grades X, XI, and XII). Findings reveal 166 integrated tolerance items, with the Merdeka Curriculum offering a more systematic distribution than the 2013 Curriculum, despite uneven chapter allocations. Qualitatively, the content encompasses dimensions of interfaith coexistence, internal community harmony, and religious freedom. The study concludes that addressing practical gaps is essential alongside content rebalancing. Strategically, this research recommends the development of supplementary learning modules utilizing problem-based learning, the establishment of specific evaluation instruments to measure tolerance internalization, the integration of digital tolerance literacy, and teacher pedagogical training to effectively foster an inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: *Tolerance Education; Islamic Religious Education; High School; Merdeka Curriculum; Content Analysis*

Abstrak

Buku ajar Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) memegang peranan penting dalam membentuk nilai moral dan sosial siswa, namun kemampuannya dalam menumbuhkan toleransi di tengah meningkatnya intoleransi di SMA masih sedikit dieksplorasi. Penelitian ini mengkaji muatan toleransi dalam buku ajar PAI terbitan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan berdasarkan Kurikulum Merdeka dan Kurikulum 2013. Menggunakan pendekatan analisis konten kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis korpus sampel purposif dari enam buku ajar PAI-BP (Buku Guru dan Buku Siswa kelas X, XI, dan XII). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat 166 konten toleransi yang terintegrasi, di mana Kurikulum Merdeka menyajikan materi secara lebih sistematis dibandingkan Kurikulum 2013, meskipun sebarannya belum merata di setiap bab. Secara kualitatif, materi mencakup dimensi hidup berdampingan, keharmonisan internal, dan nilai kebebasan beragama. Penelitian menyimpulkan perlunya penyeimbangan distribusi konten serta mengatasi keterbatasan praktis di lapangan. Sebagai langkah strategis, penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengembangan suplemen pembelajaran berupa modul toleransi berbasis problem-based learning, penyusunan instrumen evaluasi khusus untuk mengukur internalisasi nilai toleransi, penguatan materi toleransi di ruang siber/digital, serta pelatihan pedagogis bagi

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guru guna mengoptimalkan pembelajaran toleransi yang inklusif di sekolah.

Kata kunci: pendidikan toleransi; Pendidikan Agama Islam; sekolah menengah atas; Kurikulum Merdeka; analisis konten.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Arabic language holds a central position in Islam as it functions as the language of divine revelation, the language of scholarship, and the language of civilization that has given birth to the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the Muslim community. In this context, Arabic serves not merely as a medium of communication, but also shapes the worldview, cultural expression, and direction of religious thought within Muslim society. Language is not simply a tool for expressing pre-existing thoughts, but actively shapes thought itself—such is the core of the Linguistic Relativity hypothesis developed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (Hussein, 2012; Mei, 2024). Based on this framework, this study focuses on three main questions: first, how the Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity theory explains the relationship between the Arabic language, Islamic culture, and religious thought; second, to what extent the Arabic language influences the worldview and religious understanding of non-Arab speakers; and third, what the implications of this theory are for Arabic language learning among non-Arab students.

Several previous studies have demonstrated that the Arabic language makes a major contribution to preserving Islamic culture and identity. Al-'Atri et al. (2021) emphasize that Arabic plays a role in *ta'shīl al-tsaqāfah wa al-fikr al-Islāmī* (rooting Islamic culture and thought), as it serves as a tool for preserving values, religious meaning-making, and strengthening Arab-Islamic identity. Elsheakh et al. (2025) reinforce this finding by proving that Arabic plays an essential role in building Islamic civilization, serving as a medium for transmitting science, law, theology, and art that has shaped Muslim civilization across centuries. Naska (2024) found that Arabic functions as a vital resource in strengthening the religious identity of Minangkabau Muslims, particularly through social transformation processes that establish Arabic as a symbolic and spiritual reference—proof that the relationship between the Arabic language and Islamic identity

is not merely an Arab phenomenon, but a universal phenomenon among non-Arab Muslims as well.

Furthermore, research in the cognitive sociolinguistics tradition indicates that the language a person uses influences how they categorize and perceive reality (Altarriba & Basnight-Brown, 2022), a finding highly relevant to understanding the relationship between the Arabic language and Islamic comprehension. Fuadah et al. (2025) show that among students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Arabic serves as a symbol of religious identity that is evident not only in linguistic aspects, but also in the formation of attitudes and self-representation as educated Muslims. Khasanah (2024) demonstrates that from a sociolinguistic perspective, the choice of Arabic within Muslim social spaces often carries religious meaning, symbolic prestige, and ideological affiliation that directly influence the construction of individual and communal religious identity. Within this framework, the Sapir-Whorf theory remains valid for examining sacred texts not because it originated from the Western tradition, but because it provides an analytical tool to examine how linguistic structures mediate perception, categorization, and the production of meaning; at this point, the theory can be critically employed as a reading tool compatible with Islamic studies without diminishing the normative authority of the sacred text.

Although these studies have highlighted the relationship between the Arabic language and culture, identity, and religiosity, there remains a significant gap in the literature that specifically integrates three dimensions simultaneously—namely Islamic culture, religious thought (*al-fikr al-dīnī*), and the implications for Arabic language education—within a single coherent theoretical framework through the lens of Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity. Most research tends to focus on only one aspect, thus failing to provide an adequate conceptual synthesis of how Arabic operates simultaneously as a cultural foundation and a religious epistemology for non-Arab Muslim communities.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to explicitly and systematically apply the Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity theory to the context of Arabic as the language of revelation within the framework of Indonesian Islamic education—a conceptual synthesis that has rarely been undertaken in previous literature. This article offers a new

analytical framework connecting three dimensions at once: the cognitive dimension (Sapir-Whorf), the Islamic dimension (Arabic as the language of revelation and civilization), and the pedagogical dimension (implications for non-Arab Arabic language learning) within a coherent argumentative structure.

Theoretically, this study enriches the treasury of Islamic sociolinguistic studies by presenting a synthesis between Western cognitive theory and the Islamic Arabic scholarly tradition. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for developing an Arabic curriculum that is more meaningful, oriented toward shaping an Islamic worldview, and relevant for non-Arab Muslim generations living amidst globalization and the dominance of international languages—so that Arabic is understood not merely as a school subject, but as a strategic means for shaping authentic identity, Islamic culture, and religious thought.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research model to describe and analyze the role of the Arabic language in shaping Islamic culture and religious thought through the theoretical framework of Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity. According to Abubakar (2021), "qualitative research is research whose data consist of words and sentences, meaning the data are not in numerical form". This approach was chosen because the study aims to understand meanings, inter-conceptual relationships, and patterns of thought in depth, rather than through statistical measurement.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from works that directly discuss the Sapir-Whorf theory, the Arabic language, Islamic culture, and religious thought, as well as journal articles in sociolinguistics and Islamic studies. Secondary data were acquired from supporting references containing explanations of linguistic relativity, language cognition, and Arabic language education studies. The selection of all sources was conducted selectively based

on the relevance of their content to the research focus and the credibility of the scientific publications.

The data collection technique used is documentation. Abubakar (2021) explains that documentation is one way of conducting preliminary studies, namely through "books, magazines, reports, and other written materials containing various information related to the research problem".

The data analysis technique employed is descriptive-analytical content analysis. Sugiyono (2013) explains that the qualitative research process consists of three stages: the description stage, the reduction/focus stage, and the selection stage, where at each stage the researcher conducts continuous inductive analysis to discover patterns, models, and themes from the collected data. Referring to this flow, the analysis in this study was carried out through four steps: first, data reduction, namely sorting and selecting data relevant to the theme of the role of Arabic within the Sapir-Whorf framework; second, theme grouping, namely organizing data into conceptual categories; third, meaning interpretation, namely examining relationships between concepts in depth; and fourth, drawing conclusions inductively.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity Theory and Its Relevance to the Arabic Language

The Theory of Linguistic Relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, rests on the idea that the language a person uses actively influences how they think, perceive reality, and understand the world (Glushchenko et al., 2024). This theory exists in two versions: the strong version (linguistic determinism), which states that language absolutely determines thought, and the weak version (linguistic relativity), which states that language influences (rather than completely determines) worldview and cognition (Vaishnav, 2025). In its development, the weak version has received wider support from empirical evidence, including in studies of color perception, object categorization, and cross-cultural memory (Alshamary, 2024).

The Sapir-Whorf concept is supported by various contemporary cognitive studies demonstrating that language tangibly influences human perception and cognition. Lupyan et al. (2020) proved that language actively modulates visual perception and concept formation. Thierry (2016) emphasized through neurolinguistic studies that language flexibly shapes human perception and cognition, a finding he termed 'neurolinguistic relativity'. Furthermore, Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2022) demonstrated that the interplay between language and culture across time influences how individuals process, interpret, and respond to their social and cognitive experiences.

In the context of the Arabic language and Islam, the Sapir-Whorf theory holds exceptionally strong relevance. The root-based morphological structure of Arabic (juzur/isytiqaq) creates a distinctive semantic network not found in other languages. For example, a single triliteral root س-ل-م (s-l-m) generates the concepts of Islam (submission), Muslim (one who submits), Salam (peace), Salim (safe/sound), and Aslama (to surrender oneself)—all interconnected within a single cognitive framework regarding submission to Allah as the source of peace. This phenomenon demonstrates that Arabic does not merely name reality, but shapes the way of thinking about it (Alshamary, 2024). Khalil (2026) affirms that linguistic relativity has real implications for how individuals perceive and understand their environment, a principle highly relevant to understanding how Arabic shapes an Islamic worldview. Fernandez-Duque et al. (2023) even showed that speakers of different languages remember and process reality differently, a finding that supports the claim that non-Arab learners who master Arabic will experience a cognitive shift in understanding Islamic teachings.

The Role of the Arabic Language in Shaping Islamic Culture

The Arabic language occupies a vital position in the formation of Islamic culture because it is not merely a tool of communication, but also a vehicle for transmitting Islamic values, symbols, and systems of meaning. Therefore, the Sapir-Whorf framework is relevant for explaining how Arabic participates in shaping Islamic culture, especially when understood as weak linguistic relativity—where language influences perception, categorization, and interpretive habits rather than determining thought absolutely

(Ioannis B. Rigas, 2026). Farah and Mudassir (2025) emphasize that Arabic plays a role in promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance in the era of globalization, a function only possible because Arabic has been embedded as the foundation of Islamic civilization. Arabic serves as the primary means for transmitting teachings, building scholarly authority, and affirming the identity of the Muslim community across a long historical trajectory (Al Yamin, 2023).

Arabic as the Language of Revelation and Source of Islamic Cultural Values

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, and the Prophetic Hadiths also emerged within the Arabic linguistic tradition, making this language the primary gateway to understanding the normative sources of Islam (Agustini, 2023). From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, this fact carries profound implications: Divine revelation did not choose the Arabic language arbitrarily, but rather because the cognitive structure of Arabic is capable of accommodating and conveying complex theological meanings with unmatched precision. Erdy (2025) shows that the origins and linguistic development of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the distinctive phonological and morphological systems of the Arabic language itself, which make it the perfect medium of revelation. Putra et al. (2025a) affirm that Arabic's contribution to Islamic epistemology is evident in its ability to connect revelation with the integration of knowledge, allowing Islamic culture to develop upon a foundation of authentic texts and meanings. Fu'ād et al. (2024) add that during the Second Umayyad Dynasty, Arabic functioned as a pillar of civilization ensuring the continuous transmission of Islamic values from one generation to the next. In other words, Arabic shapes Islamic culture through the internalization of values from revealed texts into social behavior, educational traditions, and religious practices.

The Influence of Arabic on Islamic Rituals, Traditions, and Symbols

In daily worship practices, Muslims recite supplications (du'a), remembrances (dhikr), takbir, tahlil, and prayer recitations (shalat) in Arabic, so that the language is present not only on an intellectual plane, but also on performative and spiritual planes (Ikhwan & B., 2024). Within the framework of linguistic relativity, the daily repetition of rituals in Arabic is not merely a verbal routine, but gradually shapes a Muslim's thought patterns, emotional structure, and value orientation toward life (Lupyan et al., 2020). Suri

and Tanjung (2024) demonstrate that metaphor and symbolism in the language of the Qur'an, particularly in the concept of tawhid (monotheism), operate as cognitive instruments that shape how its speakers understand divine reality—concrete proof of the linguistic relativity hypothesis in the context of sacred texts. Rifana (2024) explains that Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic to the modern era has contributed to building Islamic cultural and religious expression, while Azizah and Maulani (2024) show that the art of Arabic calligraphy has become an important part of Islamic cultural expression in Indonesia. At this juncture, Arabic becomes a sacred language that not only connects humans with the transcendental dimension, but also shapes a distinctive religious sensibility in the lives of Muslims.

Arabic in the Formation of Muslim Identity

The Arabic language plays a major role in shaping the identity of the Muslim community. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is never neutral; it always carries social, ideological, and cultural meanings (Khasanah, 2024). Viqri et al. (2025) emphasize that the Arabic language and cultural identity are two mutually reinforcing entities: mastery of Arabic strengthens the sense of ownership over Islamic tradition, while Islamic identity drives motivation to learn Arabic. Fuadah et al. (2025) found that students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung interpret Arabic as a symbol of religious identity—not merely a university course, but a self-representation as knowledgeable Muslims. Yamin (2023) demonstrates that Arabic functions both as an Islamic cultural identity and a unifier of ethnic diversity, a vital function in Indonesia's multicultural context. Iman et al. (2025) reiterate that cultural schemata and linguistic relativity interact in shaping a person's perception and identity within diverse communities, a finding highly relevant to understanding the role of Arabic in building the identity of non-Arab Muslims in Indonesia. In line with this, Munibi (2025) shows that language acts as a catalyst for shaping religious identity and ideology in social media spaces, meaning that strengthening Arabic in the digital era is an important strategy for maintaining the cohesion of Islamic identity.

The Role of the Arabic Language in Shaping Religious Thought (الفكر الديني)

The Arabic language holds a critical position in shaping Islamic religious thought because the entire foundational structure of Islamic knowledge rests upon the language of revelation. Within the Sapir-Whorf framework, Arabic is not merely a medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge, but a cognitive instrument that actively shapes how Muslims understand God, humanity, law, morality, and social life (Mei, 2024). Salaam (2025) affirms that language plays a fundamental role in shaping religious practices and beliefs, as language is not simply a tool of expression, but a shaper of the spiritual and cognitive orientation of its adherents. Toan (2024) demonstrates that religious language plays a role in building faith and the cohesion of religious communities, a function that in the Islamic context relies heavily on the speaker's ability to understand and use Arabic authentically.

Arabic as the Foundation for Understanding the Qur'an and Hadith

Every word, sentence structure, rhetorical style, and diction choice in sacred texts carries meaning implications that critically determine religious understanding. Aziz and Saihu (2022) emphasize that linguistic exegesis (tafsir lughawi) is indispensable because the meaning of the Qur'an often depends on Arabic linguistic elements such as syntax (nahwu), morphology (sharaf), rhetoric (balaghah), and the context of word usage. Ondeng et al. (2024) add that the Qur'an itself has shaped and influenced the development of the Arabic language and its literary tradition, rendering the relationship between the Qur'an and Arabic reciprocal and mutually formative. Meanwhile, Djamaluddin et al. (2024) show that the status of Hadith in the development of the Arabic language is immense, as Hadith serves not only as a source of law, but also as a medium for enriching vocabulary, expressive structures, and Islamic argumentative patterns.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the fact that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic contains profound cognitive implications: those who understand Arabic directly have access to layers of meaning that cannot be fully reached through translation. Hanif (2025) emphasizes that learning Arabic can act as a stimulus for tahfizh (Qur'an memorization) students to understand the meanings of Qur'anic verses more deeply, rather than merely reciting them. Ruhaya (2023) also found that fostering Arabic language learning significantly develops students' ability to comprehend the Qur'an, proving that mastery

of Arabic is directly proportional to the depth of religious literacy. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, this indicates that Arabic serves not merely as a tool for reading sacred texts, but shapes the cognitive framework for understanding revelation—something that cannot be fully replaced by translation (Fernandez-Duque et al., 2023).

The Influence of Arabic in Tafsir, Fiqh, and Kalam

In the field of exegesis (tafsir), Arabic serves as the instrument for interpreting the wording of the Qur'an through linguistic, semantic, and rhetorical approaches. Tsauri et al. (2021) show that the rhetorical exegetical style (tafsir balāghī) places the beauty and expressive power of Arabic as a pathway to understanding deeper divine meanings. Quba and Qatawna (2023) reinforce this finding through a discourse analysis of Surah Al-Duhā, demonstrating that the linguistic structure of the Qur'an has direct implications for contemporary discourse—meaning that an accurate understanding of the sacred text is only possible if the reader possesses adequate Arabic linguistic competence. Musaffa (2025) even demonstrates that language politics in Qur'anic translation practices in Indonesia can influence the authority of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), meaning that Arabic remains the primary reference in preserving the accuracy of Islamic legal meanings.

In the field of fiqh, Arabic plays a direct role in the process of legal derivation (istinbāṭ). Syaripudin et al. (2024) empirically proved that Arabic comprehension significantly influences a person's ability to formulate fiqh legal conclusions. This means that weak mastery of Arabic directly impacts the quality of Islamic legal reasoning. In the realm of Islamic theology (kalam), Arabic serves as the medium for constructing theological arguments and systematically formulating creedal terms. Magomedova (2023) affirms that Islamic theolinguistics reveals how religious thought and religious communication develop within multilingual spaces while remaining centered on Arabic as the primary source of reference. Through the lens of Sapir-Whorf, these three traditions of Islamic scholarship (tafsir, fiqh, and kalam) demonstrate that Arabic is not merely a medium, but a shaper of the theological-legal cognitive structure of Islam itself.

Arabic as the Primary Tool for Ijtihad and Scholarly Thought

Independent legal reasoning (ijtihad) demands the ability to understand texts comprehensively, weigh contexts, and connect scriptural evidence (dalil) with new realities. Therefore, Islamic scholars (ulama) require not only religious knowledge, but also mastery of the Arabic language as an instrument for reading scriptural texts (nash) carefully (Muhtadin et al., 2022). Putra et al. (2025b) emphasize that Arabic's contribution to Islamic epistemology is evident in the integration between revelation and knowledge that forms the basis for the emergence of ijtihad. Siregar et al. (2024) demonstrate through a study of Ibn Jinni's linguistic thought that the classical Arabic grammatical tradition possesses methodological depth that directly underpins textual interpretation, legal reasoning, and Islamic religious thought—an intellectual heritage accessible only through deep mastery of Arabic.

Lumbard (2024) stresses that epistemic sovereignty in Islam is closely tied to the ability to maintain original references and scholarly authority from Arabic texts, because without adequate linguistic competence, Muslims are vulnerable to relying on third-party interpretations that potentially reduce original meanings. Poya and Rizapoor (2023) show through a study of Al-Ghazali's epistemology that the integration of knowledge in the Islamic tradition demands thought rooted in the comprehension of Arabic texts—a competence that cannot be simplified through translation alone. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, sound ijtihad requires not only technical linguistic competence, but also the internalization of the worldview embedded within the cognitive structure of the Arabic language itself, which can only be achieved through deep mastery of Arabic (Khalil, 2026).

Furthermore, Huda (2021), through a study of the typology of contemporary scholars, shows that great Islamic scholars became authoritative figures precisely because of the depth of their mastery over the Arabic language, enabling them to produce works that remain references for the Muslim community today. This reinforces that in the Islamic tradition, Arabic proficiency is not merely a technical prerequisite, but an epistemic foundation determining the quality and depth of religious thought. Therefore, from a Sapir-Whorf perspective, strengthening Arabic language learning for non-Arab students means opening their access to a cognitive system that enables a more authentic,

profound understanding of Islam rooted in its original scholarly tradition (Hussein, 2012).

Contemporary Challenges to the Role of the Arabic Language

The role of the Arabic language in Islamic culture and thought faces new and increasingly complex challenges in the era of globalization, digitalization, and the dominance of international languages. This condition creates tension between the need for global competence and efforts to maintain an Islamic identity rooted in the Arabic language (Alsaied et al., 2025). Saboor and Gamil (2024) show that Arabic in the era of globalization faces dual pressures—both literary and linguistic—as both confront the dominance of international languages that threaten the vitality of Arabic as a language of civilization. Alsaied (2024) indicates that Arabic language learning faces immense pressure from globalization because foreign languages are often associated with progress and social prestige, causing motivation to learn Arabic among young Muslims to decline. Sholihin et al. (2025) emphasize that Arabic needs to be viewed not only as a religious language, but also as a language capable of adapting to technological advancements so that it is not increasingly marginalized from strategic spaces of modern life.

Globalization Pressures and the Crisis of Motivation in Learning Arabic

Globalization has created a linguistic hierarchy that places English and several other international languages at the pinnacle of social and academic prestige. Alsaied et al. (2025) identified the phenomenon of aversion to learning and using Arabic among the younger generation, finding that its causes are structural—ranging from rigid teaching methods and perceptions that Arabic is difficult to learn, to a lack of space for using Arabic in daily life. Jalloul (2023) warns about threats to "Arabic language security" amidst the pressures of modernization and globalization; without appropriate policies, the position of Arabic as a language of civilization could be further eroded. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the decline in Arabic proficiency is not merely a communication issue, but a cognitive crisis affecting how Muslim generations understand and internalize their religion, because without the language, the Islamic worldview embedded in the structure of Arabic cannot be authentically internalized (Alshamary, 2024).

This pressure is also evident in the context of formal education. Alsaied (2024) shows that national and religious identities, which ought to be strengthened through Arabic language learning, actually weaken when the educational system prioritizes the mastery of foreign languages. Farah and Mudassir (2025) remind us that Arabic actually holds great potential as a language of intercultural dialogue and tolerance, but this potential can only be realized if Muslim communities actively maintain and develop their Arabic proficiency amidst competition with international languages.

The Weakening of Arabic Proficiency and Its Epistemic Implications

The weakening of Arabic proficiency among certain Muslim circles is a serious challenge with dimensions deeper than mere pedagogical issues. Many Muslims still maintain an emotional closeness to Arabic through worship rituals, but do not always possess adequate ability to understand religious texts independently (Agustini, 2023). Musaffa (2025) illustrates how reliance on translation in Qur'anic interpretation practices in Indonesia can affect the authority of fiqh law—concrete proof that weak Arabic proficiency directly impacts the quality of religious thought.

Ghani et al. (2025) found that barriers to mastering Arabic among Muslim students are not only linguistic, but also environmental and pedagogical—with the lack of an Arabic-speaking environment, non-communicative teaching approaches, and insufficient institutional support serving as primary factors. Within the Sapir-Whorf framework, this condition indicates a severed cognitive chain between the language of revelation and authentic religious understanding, resulting in many Muslims practicing their religion ritually without full access to the wealth of meaning stored within the structure of the Arabic language (Muhammad Nur Iman et al., 2025).

Digital Challenges and Efforts to Preserve the Arabic Language

The digital era presents both opportunities and threats for the Arabic language. Romadona et al. (2024) remind us that preserving Arabic script in the digital era requires creative solutions so that traditional linguistic forms survive in modern society. Mardani and Nissa (2025) offer an optimistic perspective, namely that Arabic can function as a bridge for scientific and technological literacy in the Islamic world, provided that the

Muslim academic community proactively develops Arabic terminology relevant to contemporary scientific developments. Khairanis and Aldi (2025) show that in the digital era, Arabic can still play a strategic role in strengthening the cultural identity of Muslims, especially if Arabic language learning is integrated with digital platforms favored by the younger generation. Anzalman et al. (2024) affirm that Arabic can serve as a means of strengthening Islamic identity in the digital era, though this requires a transformation toward learning approaches that are more contextual, adaptive, and technology-based.

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology also presents new and more complex challenges. A study by Al-Jarf (2025) shows that AI-narrated Arabic videos still exhibit pronunciation errors that potentially lower the phonological accuracy of Arabic. Additionally, Ali and Qasim (2026) emphasize that training data dominated by non-Arabic languages can distort AI translation results from Arabic into English, risking a shift in original meaning. Hady et al. (2026) add that while AI-based Arabic learning opens opportunities for pedagogical innovation, it also requires strict quality control so that technology does not replace the linguistic and cultural authority of the Arabic language itself.

On the other hand, social media hijrah (religious renewal) trends also influence how Arabic is used in digital spaces. Aburqayiq et al. (2025) found that Arabic-English code-mixing on social media accelerates the shift in linguistic form from an established grammatical system toward more fluid communicative forms. Arak (2024), Maidah et al. (2025), and Uyuni et al. (2024) also demonstrate that digital Arabic trends frequently result in meaning simplification, new semantic broadening, and the symbolic use of religious terms without adequate semantic depth. In the context of digital hijrah, Arabic often appears as a visual and spiritual identity, yet is sometimes detached from the accuracy of its original structure and meaning.

From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the presence of Arabic in digital spaces is not merely a matter of technical accessibility; it is a cognitive strategy to ensure that the Islamic worldview embedded in Arabic remains alive, developing, and relevant for Muslim generations growing up in a digital ecosystem (Khalil, 2026). Thus, contemporary

challenges to the Arabic language are not merely threats, but also a call for bolder and more visionary pedagogical innovations and language policies.

Relevance for Non-Arab Arabic Language Education

The findings of this study have direct and strategic implications for Arabic language education among non-Arab learners. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, the goal of learning Arabic must not stop at mastering linguistic rules alone, but must encompass the internalization of the Islamic worldview embedded within the cognitive structure of the Arabic language itself (Alshamary, 2024). Aulia and Anggraeni (2023) emphasize that the urgency of Arabic language learning in Islamic education lies precisely in its ability to shape authentic religious consciousness, rather than mere formal linguistic competence. Therefore, Arabic curriculum designers need to integrate components of cultural competence (al-kafā'ah al-tsaqāfiyyah) that enable learners to understand Arabic not just as a linguistic system, but as a system of meaning that shapes Islamic worldview and thought. Latifah et al. (2025) indicate that the transformation of the Arabic curriculum in Indonesia needs to be examined historically and philosophically so that innovations remain rooted in the essential goal: forming an Islamic worldview through mastery of the language of revelation.

Curriculum Reorientation: From Structural-Grammatical to Cultural-Cognitive

Shifting the orientation of learning from a structural-grammatical (nahwu-sharf centric) approach toward a cultural-cognitive approach is an urgent necessity supported by various empirical findings. Ekawati and Arifin (2022) emphasize that approaches to Arabic language learning must balance theory, concept, and implementation; it is insufficient to merely master rules without understanding the cultural context and deeper meanings. Mustofa (2025), through a study of epistemology and axiology in the direct method of Arabic learning, found that methods grounded in Islamic epistemic values yield more meaningful learning compared to methods focused solely on mastering grammatical structures.

Triani and Putra (2023) demonstrate that contextual teaching and learning can significantly increase student engagement and comprehension because the material is

directly linked to Islamic life realities relevant to the learners. Mabrurrosi et al. (2023) proved that David Nunan's communicative approach is effective in Arabic learning at Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) because it places communication at the center of the learning process, training students not only to understand language structures but also to use them in real religious contexts. Sakinah and Sofa (2025) add that a holistic approach in Arabic language learning yields more comprehensive results by integrating linguistic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously. Within the framework of linguistic relativity, these communicative-contextual and holistic approaches are important not only for improving language proficiency, but for facilitating the cognitive shift that is the ultimate goal of learning Arabic as a religious language (Altarriba & Basnight-Brown, 2022).

Nurmawaddah (2022) shows that implementing character education in Arabic language learning can produce students who are not only linguistically competent, but also possess moral integrity embedded in Islamic values. Mukhlis et al. (2024) affirm that the true goal of Islamic education is the formation of individuals of noble character who make positive contributions, and the Arabic language is the primary instrument for achieving that goal among non-Arab Muslim communities. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, this means an ideal Arabic curriculum must be designed not merely as a linguistic program, but as a worldview-shaping program (Vaishnav, 2025).

The Communicative Approach and the Formation of Cultural Competence

Integrating cultural competence into Arabic language learning requires an approach that goes beyond mere vocabulary and grammar mastery. Aliyah et al. (2025) show that implementing a communicative approach in Arabic learning proves effective in improving functional and contextual Arabic usage. Choiroh (2021) demonstrates that Arabic textbooks integrating Indonesian cultural contexts within a multicultural education perspective can increase learning relevance and motivation for non-Arab students, as they see a connection between their local identity and the Arabic-speaking Islamic tradition.

Ikhwan and B. (2024) emphasize that Arabic learning linked to Islamic propagation (da'wah) and social change generates stronger intrinsic motivation in students, as they understand that mastering Arabic has a tangible impact on the religious and social life of their communities. Fikri (2023), through a study at an entrepreneurial dayah (traditional Islamic school) in Aceh, shows that a pesantren environment integrating Arabic learning with students' academic culture produces learners who are not only proficient in Arabic, but also possess a deeper understanding of Islam. From a Sapir-Whorf perspective, all these findings confirm that intensive and culturally meaningful exposure to Arabic produces a cognitive shift that impacts the authentic understanding and appreciation of Islam (Khalil, 2026).

Utilizing Digital Technology in Arabic Language Learning

Utilizing digital technology is a vital strategy for expanding the reach and strengthening the relevance of Arabic language learning for non-Arab students in the modern era. Pikri (2022) shows that information technology media can support Arabic learning in a more engaging and flexible manner, effectively overcoming accessibility barriers that have long hindered non-Arab learners. Humairoh and Ubaidillah (2025) demonstrate that implementing a technological approach in developing the Merdeka Curriculum for Arabic learning in Islamic junior high schools (MTs) provenly increases student engagement and learning effectiveness, showing that technological innovation and curriculum development can operate synergistically.

Muiz et al. (2025) show that learning Arabic through social media (specifically through educational Instagram accounts such as @ArabicWithEnes) can expand the reach and relevance of Arabic among the younger generation by utilizing the principles of cognitive multimedia theory. Meanwhile, Abdul Rahman et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of a comprehensive Arabic-learning environment model across various educational levels (from primary to higher education) so that the use of Arabic does not stop in formal classrooms, but becomes internalized in students' daily lives.

Mardani and Nissa (2025) offer a horizon-expanding perspective: Arabic can function as a bridge for scientific and technological literacy in the Islamic world, so that its presence in digital spaces is not merely about heritage preservation, but about

positioning Arabic as a relevant and productive language for the advancement of contemporary Islamic civilization. Thus, Arabic needs to be present in digital spaces not as a static heritage, but as a living, communicative, and adaptive language. Sholihin et al. (2025) affirm that Arabic is both a language of religion and a language of technological progress with great potential to continue developing and remaining relevant. This aligns with the Sapir-Whorf principle that intensive, contextual, and meaningful language exposure will shape learners' mindsets and perceptions more deeply and sustainably, allowing Arabic to truly function as an instrument for shaping an Islamic worldview rather than merely a subject learned and forgotten (Lupyan et al., 2020).

D. CONCLUSION

This study proves that the Arabic language is not merely a medium of communication, but a cognitive instrument that actively shapes Islamic culture and religious thought. Within the framework of Sapir-Whorf Linguistic Relativity, the root-based morphological structure of Arabic creates a distinctive semantic network that uniquely constructs an Islamic worldview, as evidenced by the untranslatability of Islamic concepts such as *taqwa*, *ihsan*, and *tawakkul*. Arabic has also proven to be the foundation of Islamic culture through its role as the language of revelation, the language of ritual, and the language of identity for Muslims across ethnicities and nations. In the realm of religious thought, mastery of Arabic determines a person's depth in interpreting the Qur'an, deriving *fiqh* laws, and conducting *ijtihad*. Consequently, Arabic language learning for non-Arab students needs to be reoriented beyond grammatical competence toward the formation of cultural-cognitive competence that enables the authentic internalization of an Islamic worldview.

However, this study has limitations as it is based on library research and thus has not empirically tested its findings through field observations, interviews, or analyses of classroom learning practices. Additionally, this study places greater emphasis on conceptual synthesis and has not comparatively examined the impact of Arabic proficiency across different Muslim socio-cultural contexts. Future research is advised to employ mixed methods or field studies to test how the Sapir-Whorf theory operates in

learning practices, exegetical authority, and the formation of religious identity within non-Arab Muslim communities. Further studies can also expand the focus to the role of digital technology, artificial intelligence, and social media in transforming the form, meaning, and authority of the Arabic language in contemporary religious spaces.

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