



The future of Arabic language
learning for non-Muslims as an
actualization of Wasathiyah
Islam in Indonesia [version 1;
peer review: awaiting peer
review]

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The future of Arabic language learning for non-Muslims as an actualization of *Wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]

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Abstract

Background: The majority of Indonesians believe and act as if the only people who can learn and be taught Arabic are Muslims. This fact goes against the basic idea that language is a way to communicate. So, the goal of this study is to find out what opportunities and plans there are for non-Muslims in Indonesia to learn Arabic. The goal of this study is to get language back to its basic function of being a way to communicate. It can also be the basis for putting *Wasathiyah* Islam into practise in Indonesia.

Methods: This study was carried out in accordance with the official guidelines for research ethics established by the Ministry of Higher Education Research in the Republic of Indonesia. Between June 11 and August 30, 2022, the research was done. The research was carried out with two approaches, namely quantitative first and followed by qualitative. After collecting and analysing data for a study, researchers submit their findings to reviewers appointed by Indonesia's Ministry of Research and Technology.

Results: A total of 64 participants were surveyed, and based on their responses, the following was determined; Researchers conduct interviews directly with informants who are considered to have the ability to provide information related to research themes. Therefore, researchers conducted interviews with 24. First, non-Muslims in Indonesia should study Arabic since language is a communication instrument. This includes religion, ethnicity, and race not limiting language acquisition. Second, teaching non-Muslims Arabic in Indonesia will help to implement *Wasathiyah* Islam there. Non-Indonesian Muslims who know Arabic will be more tolerant. Third, because Arabic is a communication tool, there is no big challenge for non-Muslims to learn Arabic.

Conclusion: However, in terms of obstacles, of course, there are many big obstacles, namely the unsupportive Arabic learning.

Keywords

Arabic Language; Non-Muslim; Islam Wasathiyah

Corresponding author: Mahyudin Ritonga (muhammadjalelritonga@gmail.com)**Author roles:** **Ritonga M:** Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software; **Wahyuni S:** Funding Acquisition, Project Administration, Writing – Original Draft Preparation; **Novigator H:** Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing**Competing interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.**Grant information:** This work was supported by the Ministry of Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia in 2022 with contract number 002/LL10/PG. AK/2022.*The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.***Copyright:** © 2023 Ritonga M *et al.* This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.**How to cite this article:** Ritonga M, Wahyuni S and Novigator H. **The future of Arabic language learning for non-Muslims as an actualization of Wasathiyah Islam in Indonesia [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]** F1000Research 2023, 12:27 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.125760.1>**First published:** 09 Jan 2023, 12:27 <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.125760.1>

Introduction

Arabic is one of the compulsory subjects in Islamic Madrasah and universities in Indonesia which has been around for several years. For Indonesia, the role of Arabic is considered strategic in diplomatic affairs with Middle Eastern countries in the fields of education, politics, business, health, and the economy.¹ This interest also refutes the narrative that states the limitations of Arabic only as a religious language in Islam. In fact, Arabic has the same function as other languages as a communication tool that can be used by everyone regardless of religion, ethnicity, culture, and race.² However, in Indonesia, most of the objects of Arabic learning are only for Muslim students while non-Muslims are not involved.³ In point of fact, the goal of studying Arabic is to enhance one's communication abilities in addition to gaining an understanding of the information included within the Qur'an, which is regarded by Muslims as their holy book.⁴ This is of course in line with the basic function of language as a communication tool so that Arabic can also be taught to non-Muslims in Indonesia.

Learning Arabic for non-Muslims is part of the reflection on grounding Arabic as an international language.⁵ Arabic is now also the sixth official language of the United Nations since 1973.^{5,6} In addition, Arabic is also used as the official language of the Organization of African Unity (OPA). Arabic is now used as the official language of the Islamic World League (*Rabithah Alam Islam*), and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OKI) which consists of 45 Islamic or Muslim-majority countries.^{6,7} However, that does not mean that Arabic is only used by Muslims but also by non-Muslims.⁸ It is known that the Urubah region, an area that includes 21 Arab countries including Arab Africa, Arab Asia, and the Arabian Gulf belonging to the Arab League with the official language of Arabic, does not entirely embrace Islam. However, Arabic cannot be separated from Islam because the main sources of law in Islam are the Al-Quran and Al-Hadith, both of which are in Arabic.⁷ This fact implies that Arabic can play a role in understanding the concept of *Wasathiyah* Islam in depth for Muslims and non-Muslims because access to learning Arabic is open to all religions.⁹

A simple understanding of *Wasathiyah* Islam is the freedom to practice one's beliefs according to one's own religion, not leaning to the right or left. Islam *Wasathiyah* contains the meaning of progressive Islam.¹⁰ In the context of Islamic education and teaching, *Wasathiyah* means a consistent attitude that combines the Qur'an with the realities of life in accordance with the times.¹¹ That is, to actualize *Wasathiyah* Islam in national and state life, one must mix the contents of the Qur'an with the context or reality of social life, making it immensely useful in constructing an Islamic image that is full of comfort and distant from all that is upsetting.¹² Today, learning Arabic for all religions is considered appropriate to be a means of presenting a complete understanding of *Wasathiyah* Islam¹³ because many terminology in the Islamic concept of *Wasathiyah* are expressed in Arabic such as *ummatan wasathan* (Qur'an 2:143), middle way (*tawasuth*) and, being fair (*'idal*), balanced (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and many more. The actualization of *Wasathiyah* Islam will be much larger in Indonesia if every element of society has a comprehensive understanding and is committed to maintaining harmony between religious communities.¹⁴

Based on the above considerations, learning Arabic for non-Muslims in the future becomes a topic that deserves serious discussion.⁵ So far, the classification of research on Arabic learning based on the characteristics of *Wasathiyah* Islam is still limited in the material aspect.¹⁵ Other studies also try to discuss the selection of the right media for campaigning Islam *Wasathiyah* in learning Arabic.¹⁶ The last is research on the challenges of learning Arabic based on *Wasathiyah* Islamic values.¹⁶ However, no fundamental research has been found on the future of learning Arabic for non-Muslims as the actualization of *Wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia. As a sovereign country with the largest number of Muslims in the world, it is time for Indonesia to enable access to Arabic learning for non-Muslim students.¹⁷ This is a concrete effort from the government in implementing¹⁶ *Wasathiyah* Islam and as a support for Arabic as an international language that must be mastered by every Indonesian student to compete in the global arena.

However, teaching Arabic for non-Muslim students with the purpose of actualizing *Wasathiyah* Islam is not easy because it will create a number of challenges and obstacles. This is natural because of the position of Arabic for non-Muslims in Indonesia as a second language which has many differences in language structure between Indonesian (their mother tongue) and Arabic (as a foreign language).⁸ Learning a language is the same as learning a culture.^{18,19} When a person learns Arabic, he or she is studying part of Arabic culture because the language is adopted from the culture and culture that developed in that area.¹⁸ Therefore, teaching Arabic to non-Muslims is like teaching them Arabic culture through the language aspect as a means of communication which can then be developed into a broad understanding of culture.^{18,20} When non-Muslim students can understand Arabic fluently, then they already have the important capital to understand the Islamic values so that they have a basis in actualizing *Wasathiyah* Islam properly.

The push for massive technological developments should make it easier for everyone to learn Arabic through online media that is connected to a computer or smartphone.¹⁹ However, the reality states otherwise as there are still Arabic students and teachers who cannot use technology in the learning process.²¹ In this condition, Arabic could be considered the object to blame because it is considered a difficult, boring, lagging, and monotonous lesson in comparison to other

languages.²⁰ In fact, there are no significant difficulties in learning Arabic as long as students and teachers are willing to dig deeper into information, innovate, and maximize the function of technology as a learning medium.²² Today, technology has also been used by some people to campaign for words using Arabic complete with translations to make it easier for everyone to understand the sentence,²³ such as *qul al-haq walau kana murran* (say the truth even though it is bitter). This shows that Arabic is not anti-non-Muslim, but that on the contrary Arabic can be well received by non-Muslims.

Methods

Ethical statement

Ethical procedures were pertained by getting the approval from the ethical committee concerned to carry out the current study. Moreover, the inclusion of papers in this research was systematically done according to some keywords criteria mentioned below. All research works consulted were included herein and aptly cited. Finally, the findings were systematically presented; no bias by the researcher was allowed to interfere in an attempt to avoid affecting the findings of the study. As per procedure, the Scientific and Ethical Approval Committee in the Language Centre Institute, Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatra gave its consent for this research after its preliminary evaluation (Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM) /Nomor: 100/LPPM.UMSB/ST/09/2022-I). Following the mandated steps, the researcher submitted this to the Head of the English Department who facilitated the scheduling of a time and place for the researcher to acquaint the respondents with the study and its aims. Subsequently, written informed consent for publication of responses was also obtained by the researcher from the participants prior to participation, thus fulfilling the ethical requirements.

This research was conducted through stages that are in accordance with research ethics set by the Ministry of Higher Education Research of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, the steps taken are to start from the initial observation related to the focus in this study. After that, the team submitted a proposal to the ministry of higher education research to be considered as a recipient of funds, this stage took place from December 2021-May 2022. In May 2022, the Ministry of Higher Education then announced the nomination of the winner of the research grant that received funding, and the University then entered into an agreement with the Region X Higher Education Service Institution (LLDIKTI-X) to find an agreement related to the completion of research by the lecturer receiving the research fund. The University's contract with LLDIKTI-X was then derived with a contract between the University through the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) and the head of the research team.

Study design

This research uses a mix method or mixed methods. The design of this research was used sequential explanatory design, which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches sequentially. The first stage was carried out using a quantitative approach and the second stage was carried out using a qualitative approach.²⁴ The quantitative approach used is in the form of a survey where the researcher conducted a survey to the respondents who are the research sample. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach used focused interviews which are described descriptively.

Participants

Participants are identified based on their ability to provide information related to the data needed according to the research theme, i.e., the teaching and learning of Arabic. Therefore, the heads of al-Islam study institutions, university leaders in charge of Al-Islam, lecturers who teach Al-Islam courses, and Arabic lecturers were identified as the right participants for this research theme. All participants were interviewed directly according to the content of the material and the data needed from them. This research was conducted through stages that are officially in accordance with research ethics set by the Ministry of Higher Education Research of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, the steps taken are to start from the initial observation related to the focus under study. After that, the team submitted a proposal to the ministry of higher education research to be considered as a recipient of funds this stage took place from December 2021 to May 2022. In May 2022, the ministry of higher education then announced the nomination of the winner of the research grant that received funding, and the University then enter into an agreement with the Region X Higher Education Service Institution (LLDIKTI X) to find an agreement related to the completion of research by the lecturer receiving the research fund. The University's contract with LLDIKTI X was then derived with a contract between the University through the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) and the head of the research team. In this case, the team through the head makes a statement of the ability.

The signing of the research contract between the Head of LPPM and the Head of the research team shows that teamwork can officially and legally begin. Therefore, the formal legality of this research began on June 10, 2022 in accordance with Contract No. 20/LPPM UMSB/SK P/06/2022. Since the signing of the contract between LPPM and the research team, researchers are given permission to collect data according to the established method. The study was conducted from 11 June 2022 to 30 August 2022. The researcher requested the willingness of the informants to provide the required data.

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The research data has been compiled and analysed is then presented before reviewers assigned by the ministry of higher education of the Republic of Indonesia. The results of the study are compiled in the form of a research report and written in the form of an article. To ensure the content contained, LPPM on Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatra establishes ethics in accordance with those applicable in the Ministry of Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia.

Data collection

Researchers conduct surveys as a technique for collecting data. The survey instrument is first arranged according to the research content. The instrument survey that has been prepared is then validated by 2 (two) experts, namely one expert in the field of *Wasathiyah*-based Islamic education and one more expert in the field of Arabic language education. The two experts provided notes related to the instrument content that had been compiled, the notes and recommendations of the two experts were used as a reference in improving the survey instrument. After the survey instrument is corrected, the researcher then disseminates it through the google form link that has been provided.

Before filling out the survey that has been distributed through the google form, participants must fill out a statement of willingness to respond to the statement that has been prepared objectively. After they fill in the statement, then they can continue to fill in and respond to the instruments that have been provided. Participants are given the opportunity to fill out the survey according to the predetermined time. The response from these participants is then automatically documented in the researcher's email. A survey was used for the quantitative approach. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach used focused interviews which are described descriptively. Using Microsoft Excel, a descriptive analysis and processing is performed on all of the data that was obtained. The kind of this research is conducted to obtain more comprehensive data on 'The Future of Arabic Language Learning for Non-Muslims as the Actualization of *Wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia' because it integrates the benefits of the two methods. The participants who filled out the survey with all the statements and answers via the email were 64 people. Meanwhile, the informants who provided data through interviews were 24 people, consisting of leaders of Al-Islam study institutions, university leaders in charge of Al-Islam, lecturers in the field of Al-Islam, and Arabic lecturers. The sampling technique of this research used was a cluster random sampling technique combined with convenience sampling, meaning that the sample is taken at random and also selected based on the availability of respondents and the ease of obtaining data. The data obtained through the survey as entered in the email is then randomized based on campus origin, study program, and religion. The formula used is RAND, the use of the formula is to ensure the percentage of those who fill out the survey based on campus origin, study program and religion, these three aspects are important to know because of the research content that aims to know the future of Arabic learning for non-Muslims.

Survey

Researchers conduct surveys as a technique for collecting data. The survey instrument is first arranged according to the research content. The instrument survey that has been prepared is then validated by two experts, namely one expert in the field of *Wasathiyah*-based Islamic education and one in the field of Arabic language education. The two experts provided notes and recommendations related to the instrument content that had been compiled, these were used as a reference in improving the survey instrument. After the survey instrument was corrected, the researcher then disseminates it through the google form link that has been provided.²⁴

Before filling out the survey that has been distributed through the google form, participants must fill out a statement of consent about the study and their participation. After they fill in the statement, then they can continue to respond to the survey that was then provided. The survey was circulated in Indonesian. Participants are given the opportunity to fill out the survey according to the predetermined time. Each question was presented as a 'yes' or 'no' response that participants could select. The response from these participants was then automatically documented in the researcher's email. Quantitative data was obtained from distributing questionnaires via Google forms.²⁵

Interviews

The interview qualitative data was obtained through Google Forms and interviews. Researchers conducted interviews directly with 24 people. The questions were asked in person, and we shared the questions in Google forms. The data collected through interviews included the following:

1. Arabic is the language of communication, not the language of religion
2. Wasathiyah Islam and Arabic Learning Models for Non-Muslims
3. Barriers and Challenges of Learning Arabic for Non-Muslims

The questions under the three research problems mentioned were in-person interviews with 24 participants, including seven Arabic language lecturers, eight Al-Islam lecturers, and nine Al-Islam university leaders. The researcher collected

responses by writing down the answers. The researcher told them to provide their answers correctly and assured them that all of their information would remain anonymous and would not be used for other purposes.

The interview technique used was a structured interview, where the researcher used interview guidelines.²⁶ The informants that were interviewed were not included in the informants surveyed, because the data required through the interview was different from the data collected through the survey. Interview informants were identified as those who are directly involved in setting curriculum policies in universities as well as those who carry out those policies. The data found based on the interview is set forth in the form of a record of the interview results.²⁶

Selective procedure

The survey took place from June 21, 2022 to August 31, 2022, within that time span participants are willing to be able to fill in each person's instrument only once. The distribution of instruments is carried out through a google form, and the recap of filling out the survey is collected and documented directly to the researcher's email. Completed surveys were sent to the researchers via email. The data extracted from the respondents were regarding: 1) Arabic as a communication tool, not a religious language; 2) Islam *Wasathiyah* and Arabic learning models for non-Muslims in Indonesia; 3) barriers and challenges of learning Arabic for non-Muslims in Indonesia.

Data analysis

Analysis of the quantitative survey data was performed by calculating a percentage of the responses, then the data were analysed using quantitative descriptive. Qualitative analysis consists of three steps after data collection: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.^{27,28} First, after the data was collected, the researcher classified the data based on the specified research problem. Second, the researcher presented the data according to the specified problem. Third, the researcher concluded the findings from the research problem. Based on the research findings, this analysis focused on the three problems that have been formulated and the data critically examined by following these three stages.²⁹ The qualitative analysis methodologies of Miles and Huberman were used for this study.

Qualitative data were collected through the interviews and used to analyze and determine the research objectives. The data collected through interviews included Arabic as the language of communication, not the language of religion, *Wasathiyah* Islam and Arabic learning models for non-Muslims, barriers and challenges of learning Arabic for non-Muslims, students' understanding of Islam instilled through learning *Al-Islam* and *Muhammadiyah*, and how non-Muslim students feel comfortable taking part in *Al-Islam* and *Kemuhammadiyah* lectures. The interviews were conducted in four phases: Friday/July 15 2022, Saturday/23 July 2022, Monday/25 July 2022, and Wednesday/27 July 2022. The interview was conducted with 24 participants, including seven Arabic language lecturers, eight *Al-Islam* lecturers, and nine *Al-Islam* university leaders. The responses were collected by writing them down. It was assured that all their information would remain anonymous and would not be used for any other purpose by the researchers.

1. Questions and responses related to (1) Arabic as the language of communication, not the language of religion, (2) interest in learning Arabic, (3) Arabic is a compulsory subject, (4) Arabic as the language of Muslim worship and the language of the holy book, (5) Arabic as an international language so Arabic is also important for people to understand, (6) a good understanding of Arabic makes individuals understand the contents of the Qur'an, and (7) that through technology people can more easily learn Arabic were related to the research problem that Arabic is the language of communication.
2. The questions and responses related to (1) learning Arabic for non-Muslims as a part of the actualization of *wasathiyah* Islam in Indonesia, (2) Indonesian non-Muslims also need to learn Arabic in order to better understand Islam *wasathiyah*, (3) inclusion of Arabic in the general education curriculum in all schools/universities in Indonesia as part of *wasathiyah* Islam, (4) living in harmony and peace between religious communities as the goal of the Islamic concept of *wasathiyah*, (5) Arabic teaching materials between Muslims and non-Muslims must be distinguished were related to the *Wasathiyah* Islam and Arabic learning models for non-Muslims research problem.
3. The questions and responses related to the (1) complexity of Arabic (such as aspects of sound, sentence structure, grammatical language) is an obstacle for individuals when learning Arabic, (2) motivation to learn Arabic, (3) lack of competence in Arabic is a big challenge for individuals to learn Arabic, (4) overcoming obstacles in learning Arabic, and (5) difficulty in learning Arabic with people of different religions are related to the barriers and challenges of learning Arabic for non-Muslim research problem.

Results

The participants who filled out the research survey instrument were 64 people (Figures 1 and 2). If reviewed demographically, the classification is as follows:

Gender	Male 43	Female 21
University Origin	Islam-based 34 People	General based 30 People
Department	Religious based 25 people	General based 39 people
Religion	Islam 42 people	Non-Muslim 22 people

Meanwhile, the informants interviewed were a total of 24 people. The demographics of these informants are based on position on college and expertise. Therefore, the informant consists of five heads of Al-Islam study institutions in universities, five people come from leaders in charge of Al-Islam in universities. The experts interviewed were seven lecturers in the field of Al-Islam and seven lecturers in Arabic. Based on Figure 1, the sample of this study comes from several recognized religions in Indonesia. As many as 77% of respondents from Islam, 17% of respondents from Protestant Christianity and 6% of respondents from Catholicism, where respondents are classified from Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic universities and general education institutions such as public high schools to public college. The education level of the respondents is 5.3% from high school education level, 42.1% undergraduate level, 47.4% master level, and 5.3% doctoral level.

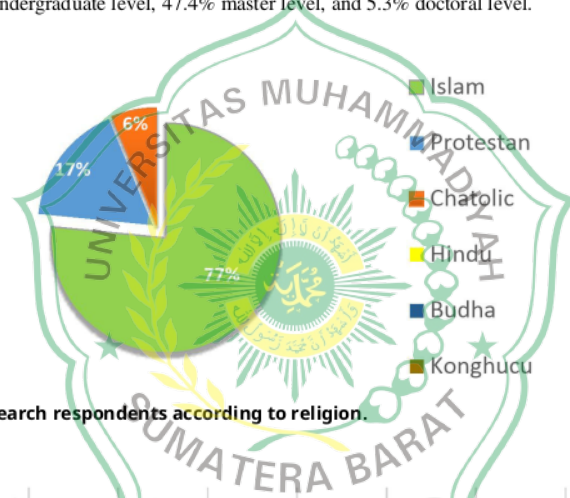


Figure 1. 64 survey research respondents according to religion.

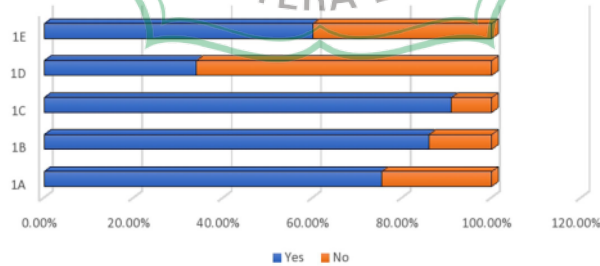


Figure 2. Results of question 1 of the survey with 64 respondents.^{25,26}

Note:

- 1A: Arabic as a communication tool, not a religious language
- 1B: Understanding Arabic well means you can also understand the Qur'an well
- 1C: Arabic is an important international language to learn
- 1D: Have a strong interest in learning Arabic
- 1E: Arabic is a compulsory subject in schools/universities

Arabic as a non-religious communication tool

Language is a tool used to express the contents of the heart, thoughts, ideas, and other ideas to the interlocutor. Through language a person can interact with each other in the living environment. This also applies to Arabic as an official communication tool used by many people to interact about their goals. However, many people also have heterogeneous viewpoints. According to them, Arabic is the language of a religion, because the texts of the holy Qur'an are in Arabic. Others also mentioned that by learning Arabic, they also learn some Islamic knowledge as most of the Islamic sciences use Arabic as the predominant language. According to Hakkoum and Raghay,³⁰ such a view cannot be blamed unilaterally, considering that it is true that the Qur'an and that some books in the area of Islamic science use Arabic only. However, it is easy to access information through technology so that someone can learn Arabic for communication needs rather than religious or scientific purposes. For more details, the researcher will present the responses of the informants and respondents with heterogeneous religious classifications regarding the position of Arabic for religious people in Indonesia as follows:

The survey above describes the position of Arabic in Indonesia as a communication tool or purely as the language of Islam (Figures 3 and 4). The questionnaire revealed different responses from the respondents where in point 1A 75.4% of respondents agreed that Arabic was positioned as a communication tool and 24.6% of respondents agreed that Arabic became the language of Islam in Indonesia. From these results it can be concluded that most respondents consider Arabic as a means of communication in Indonesia and a small proportion believe Arabic as a religious language. However, when looking at the results of interviews with respondents who became the research sample for interviews, it was found that many respondents thought that Arabic as a communication tool provided an explanation of the position of Arabic in Indonesia as an important means of communication as well as being the language of Muslims considering Indonesia has a majority Muslim population. We believe that people who have a good understanding of the Arabic language can also explore the contents of the Qur'an well.³¹ This means that everyone, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, has the opportunity to understand the contents of the Qur'an comprehensively.¹⁷ However, it is very unfortunate if someone claims to be a Muslim but is unable to understand the meaning of the Qur'an because he does not understand Arabic grammar.

As the opinion of the respondents is as follows:

“Arabic in Indonesia occupies an important position. Arabic should be used as a means of communication and occupy a higher position than other international languages in Indonesia. In fact, the government should require Muslim students in Indonesia to learn Arabic in order to explore and find out the contents of the Qur'an and As-Sunnah”.²⁶

The opinions of the participants were supported by those of other respondents. The position of Arabic in Indonesia needs to be studied more deeply and academics are important to campaign for Arabic to be able to occupy a position as a

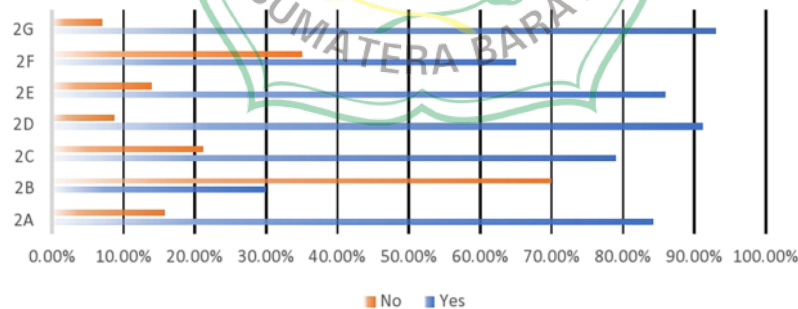


Figure 3. Results of question 2 of the survey with 64 respondents.^{25,26}

Note:

- 2A: Learning Arabic for non-Muslims is part of the actualization of Islam *Wasathiyah* in Indonesia
- 2B: Non-Muslims also need to learn Arabic in order to better understand the purpose of Islam *Wasathiyah*
- 2C: Arabic is included in the general education curriculum in all schools/universities in Indonesia as part of Islam *Wasathiyah*
- 2D: Living in harmony and peace between religious communities is the goal of the concept of Islam *Wasathiyah*
- 2E: My parents and family do not forbid me from learning Arabic
- 2F: Arabic teaching materials between Muslims and non-Muslims must be distinguished to make it easier for non-Muslim students to learn Arabic
- 2G: Technological developments make it easier for every believer to learn Arabic in Indonesia

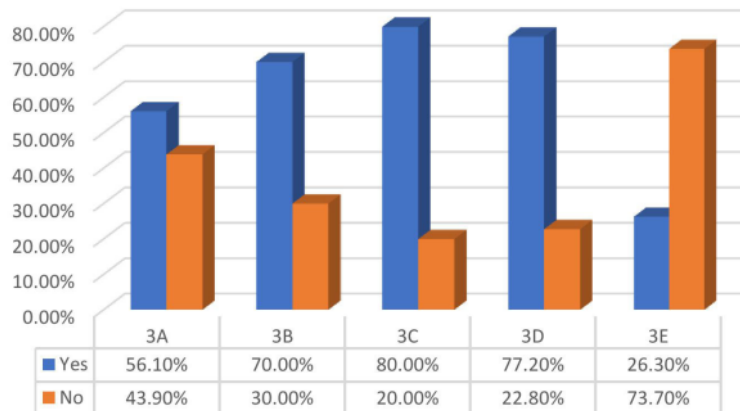


Figure 4. Results of question 3 of the survey with 64 respondents.^{25,26}

Note:

3A: Grammatical factors, word structures, and sound aspects are challenges when learning Arabic

3B: My weak Arabic competence is a serious obstacle for me to learn Arabic

3C: Environment is a supporting factor to learn Arabic

3D: Respondents' skills in overcoming obstacles in learning Arabic

3E: Respondent's negative stigma towards Arabic

communication tool. From the data in point 1C, it can be seen that most of the respondents think that Arabic has occupied the position of an important international language to learn. Even Shlowiy and Saad asserted that if you count all the varieties of Arabic today,⁸ there are around 313 million Arabic speakers worldwide, with Arabic as the fifth official language in the United Nations assembly, and the fifth most widely spoken language globally after Mandarin, Spanish, English, and Hindi.³² The rapid development of the role and function of Arabic in the international world cannot be separated from the development of the global economic system in the Middle East.³³ Therefore, Arabic plays an important role in that situation where the people there actually communicate with Arabic. Also expressed by one respondent about the role of the Arabic language in the international world is as follows:

"Arabic is a communication tool for Arabs that have spread all over the world. Arabic is very helpful for the development of knowledge in the fields of business, work, and education. In some international seminars and conferences, it is necessary to use Arabic."²⁶

However, if we look at the aspect of interest in learning Arabic, it is still less attractive to many students in Indonesia. This can be seen from the survey results at point 1D, only 34% of respondents have a strong interest in learning Arabic, and some 66% of respondents do not have the will to learn Arabic. The researcher studied the reasons for respondents who stated that they had a weak interest in learning Arabic so that it was revealed that the lack of interest of Indonesian students in learning Arabic was often motivated by the stigma of society that saw Arabic as difficult to learn. Our study revealed that Arabic in Indonesia is not a favourite subject because it is difficult and backward to learn, not cool, or that even some people are still embarrassed to use Arabic because of environmental limitations.²⁰ Of the 66% of respondents who have an interest in learning Arabic, they consider Arabic to be a global communication tool and can help them understand Arabic-language Islamic treasures. From the results of interviews with non-Muslim respondents, they admitted that they are interested in Arabic because Arabic is a unique language, and some of them are curious to reveal the contents of classic books written in Arabic (Question 3).²⁶ Even non-Muslim respondents believed that good Arabic language skills can reveal the contents of the Qur'an comprehensively (Question 2). This is in line with the opinion of Nasier and Nurdianto who said that the depth of the meaning of the Qur'an can only be revealed by people who have a deep understanding of Arabic both in terms of meaning, language rules, and word structure.^{7,32}

Arabic language skills are the key to unlocking the secrets in every meaning of the word of the Qur'an.³⁴⁻³⁶ However, the lack of parental encouragement and no government regulation that requires all students to learn Arabic makes the lack of interest in learning Arabic intensely. These two factors are behind the limited reach of the Arabic language in Indonesia.³⁷ In public schools or universities, Arabic is only a subject of local content or foreign language of specialization, while in Islamic schools and colleges Arabic is a compulsory subject for all students³⁸⁻⁴⁰ This condition will slowly rule out Arabic compared to other international languages such as English which is a compulsory subject for all interfaith students. However, many respondents support Arabic as a compulsory subject from elementary school to university level, in its

function as a communication tool (Question 1). A few respondents also refused to teach Arabic intensively for non-Muslim students, it was enough to include it in extracurricular activities so that those who were interested in Arabic could learn through these facilities. According to Carroll and friends Arabic in extracurricular activities has been around for a long time and interest in learning Arabic is still minimal, so the researcher suggests including Arabic in the list of compulsory subjects for all interfaith students based on the considerations above.⁴¹

Islam Wasathiyah and Arabic language teaching models for non-Muslims in Indonesia

Basically, the actualization of Islam *Wasathiyah* in learning Arabic has existed since Islam came to Indonesia, it's just that the Islamic *Wasathiyah* campaign has only emerged recently so it seems like a new issue.⁴² From the beginning of the spread of Islam in Indonesia around the 7th century AD, Islamic teachings were spread by Arabs living on the west coast of Sumatra in Barus or Fansur villages using Arabic script books.^{43,44} Sya' bani describe the presence of Islam carries a message of conditioning human hearts as a religion of *rahmatanlil' alamin* to this day as the purpose of strengthening *Wasathiyah* Islam is basically to create order in religious communities, protect the rights of religious adherents in exercising freedom of religion, create peace and peace in religious life and to realize the welfare of religious people.¹⁴

At point 2B not many of the respondents support that non-Muslims only need to learn Arabic as a form of understanding against *Washathiyah* Islam. In this case, the researcher looked at the responses from the respondents, to determine that those learning Arabic has no interest in anything related to religion. According to them, a person's need in learning a language is only for daily communication and interaction when needed. Only 30% of the respondents think that non-Muslims need to learn Arabic to understand *Wasathiyah* Islam. This is also in accordance with the 2C aspect, namely regarding the Arabic language curriculum being included in general education. Many of the respondents supported this, especially Muslim 77% of total respondents from both the survey and interviews. However, not for non-Muslim respondents. According to Hassan and Abdullah,¹⁰ Arabic may be included in the general education curriculum with the aim of learning Arabic as a necessity that can be used in the future, not only as part of *Wasathiyah* Islam. So that there is no discrimination for non-Muslims to learn Arabic for needs other than communication and the needs that are used.

Problems and challenges to learning Arabic for non-Muslims in Indonesia

Learning Arabic in Indonesia faces serious obstacles and challenges.⁴⁵ The inhibiting factor is even more real when faced with non-native speakers, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Not only for non-Muslims, but Muslims who use Arabic in religious rituals still encounter many obstacles and challenges in learning Arabic because Arabic is not a communication language that has many language environments in Indonesia. Kim said that language is a culture and a habit, the more accustomed to using Arabic in interacting and making it a culture, the Arabic language skills will form by itself.³⁷ The emptiness of the Arabic language environment is certainly a difficulty for students to actualize Arabic in real life. Similar provisions also apply to non-Muslims when learning Arabic will need the right space to communicate Arabic.^{27,28} In the formulation of the second problem, the researcher will describe the results obtained regarding the obstacles and challenges of non-Muslim students in learning Arabic.

Based on the picture above, it can be revealed that a number of elements contained in Arabic such as aspects of sound, sentence structure, grammatical, and many more, turned out to be obstacles for 56% of respondents. Other elements such as aspects of media use, selection of methods, strategies, learning styles, and curriculum used in fact face serious challenges and problems. This variety of problems will certainly have an impact on non-Muslim students in learning Arabic. 70% of the respondents felt that learning Arabic is a formidable challenge for them due to this. This challenge is triggered by the development of globalization which requires everyone to be skilled in operating technology, so that two skills must be mastered at once, namely Arabic language skills and technology use skills.

Discussion

Today, there are at least three challenges and obstacles that non-Muslim students will face when they want to learn Arabic. First, the linguistic aspect, as the linguistic difference between Indonesian and Arabic causes its own difficulties for Indonesian non-Muslims in learning Arabic, plus Arabic writing system which has certain rules and pronunciation of letter sounds that have no equivalent in Indonesian, there is also material on semantic aspects that discuss changes in meaning, differences in syntactic and morphological levels where in Arabic there is a change in word form that has a different level of complexity. different from Indonesian. In Indonesian it is known as basic words which then undergo a morphological process (affixes, repetitions, compound words), but the morphological process in Arabic relies on root words (*tsulatsi, ruba'i, and khumasi*) known as *tashrif*.

Second, the curriculum aspect, as in Indonesia there are two systems for presenting the Arabic curriculum, namely the integrated curriculum and separated curriculum. Both systems are a challenge for non-Muslim students because there are no regulations governing the Arabic language curriculum for non-Muslims either in madrasas or schools. In madrasas, in general they use an integrated curriculum, because Arabic is studied integrally as a separate subject that must be studied

by every student. In schools, in general, Arabic is the subject of choice for students to improve foreign language skills. While in Islamic boarding schools, Arabic is usually studied through special subjects such as *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *balaghah*, *fiqh*, interpretation, and others. Third, the social aspect, the lack of sociological support for non-Muslims to learn Arabic is a challenge. This can be seen from the time Arabic was included in the national curriculum until now Arabic is still an exclusive subject for Muslims. In fact, researchers see the big role of Arabic being able to strengthen the massive actualization of Islam *Wasathiyah* in Indonesia if it is also taught to non-Muslims through this scientific study.

In addition to the above aspects, according to them, a supportive environment is also an important aspect in learning Arabic.⁴⁶ However, as is known, the Arabic language environment in Indonesia is currently not widely found, especially for non-Muslims. In fact, in order to acquire the language more quickly and effectively, it is necessary to practice speaking Arabic directly. The Arabic environment referred to here is that there is no other language used in interacting except using Arabic. Because learning Arabic as a means of communication. If you want to be good at the language, it is recommended to live and interact with people who use Arabic as their daily language. The language environment greatly influences the process of one's language development and can stimulate one's interest and motivation in language. Madigan and friends assessed that 80% of a person's language skills are shaped by environmental factors, while another 20% are obtained through theory.⁴⁷

However, another factor that they think is more important is the views and responses of the majority of people who consider Arabic as the identity of Islam in Indonesia. Of course, this kind of response is a challenge for non-Muslims to learn Arabic. It is different if Indonesia is not a Muslim majority so that the inhibiting factor for us is when we start learning Arabic. Most of the non-Muslim respondents in Indonesia are not familiar with Arabic even when speaking it. In addition, special Arabic language teachers for non-Muslims are not easy to find. Akmalia and friends stated that the vacancy or scarcity of Arabic language teachers for non-Muslims is due to the absence of regulations governing it such as Arabic subjects for non-Muslims, the scope of Arabic language materials for non-Muslims.⁴⁸ Research data obtained by researchers found as many as 77% of respondents can overcome the obstacles they face. Abdulhameed explained that there will be many easy ways to learn Arabic if you have a strong will to learn, discipline, have a vision, and learn voluntarily without pressure and coercion.⁴⁹ Moreover, technological sophistication can provide free Arabic learning services with selected materials according to the needs of learners that can be accessed anytime and anywhere.

Consideration of the development of the Arabic language in Indonesia should also be used as a reason for teaching Arabic to non-Muslims. Moreover, Arabic in Indonesia has been studied since the time Islam entered Indonesia. Arabic has also been known by the Indonesian people since they knew Islam. However, Arifin *et al.*, revealed until now the journey of Arabic in Indonesia is still limited to the interests of reading and understanding the Qur'an. Even if for the purpose of diplomacy with countries in the Middle East it can only be reached by a few people who have an interest as long as there is no policy from the government that makes Arabic a part of the national curriculum for all religious adherents. That way, along with the development of the times and the increasingly modern era of human needs, Arabic is not limited to one religion, but Arabic can also be used for the common good. Therefore, Arabic is not only learned by a group of Islamic religions in Indonesia, but also can be learned by all interfaith communities as a communication tool in interacting needs.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that: a) Arabic has been present in Indonesia since Islam entered Indonesia in the 7th century AD and from now until now Arabic is used as a communication tool to interact between one person and another about common goals and objectives. This is a strong argument that Arabic is not a religious language for Muslims in Indonesia even though Indonesia is the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world; b) the paradigm shift in Arabic as a means of communication in Indonesia makes Arabic relevant to be taught to non-Muslims, although this is a new proposal, it can be used as an instrument option for the actualization of Islam *Wasathiyah* in Indonesia. The government, in this case the Ministry of Religion, has an important role in making Arabic an inclusive lesson that is open to all interfaith students in the national curriculum. While the Arabic language learning model that can be used for non-Muslim students is through a multi-literacy learning model starting from basic literacy which discusses the basics of language skills (*istima'*, *kalam*, *qira'ah*, and *kitabah*), introduction of the sound system, *'alamattasykil*, basic vocabulary, *nahwu* and *shorof*; c) Considering that language is something that must be learned, there are certainly obstacles and challenges for non-Muslims. Several obstacles were encountered such as pronunciation and writing that were not the same and also not commensurate with any language, changes in word form which also became changes in meaning, grammatical language which was quite complicated. Barriers like this are encountered because there is no intense learning carried out both at school and outside of school. This makes non-Muslims who learn Arabic feel challenged because there is no official regulation from the government that includes Arabic curriculum as a compulsory subject for non-Muslims. For non-Muslims who have never studied Arabic or even never know how the form of the Arabic part will be a big challenge for them in starting to learn Arabic.

Based on the conclusions above from the survey results and also corroborated by interviews, this research is proof that Arabic is not only learned for Muslims. However, non-Muslims can also learn Arabic because according to him Arabic is the result of human culture that is used as a communication tool in interacting so that there are no limits for learners and their use. So that we as researchers suggest for further researchers to be able to develop this research, which is to present a suitable and appropriate learning model and its effectiveness has been tested for non-Muslims. So that in the future Arabic can become a preferred language lesson and become a need for the international community and can also be aligned with other international languages.

Data availability

Underlying data

Figshare: The future of Arabic language learning for non-Muslims as an actualization of wasathiyah Islam in Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21485691.v2>.²⁶

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The project contains the following underlying data:

- Complete underlying data.xlsx. (anonymised 64 survey responses).
- Underlying interview data (anonymized).xlsx (anonymised 24 interviews responses).

Extended data

Figshare: The future of Arabic language learning for non-Muslims as an actualization of wasathiyah Islam in Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21485691.v2>.²⁶

This project contains the following extended data:

- Arabic language survey questions. (Survey questions used in this study in English language)
- Arabic language survey questions. (Survey questions used in this study in Indonesian language)
- Interview Questionnaire – English.docx. (Blank copy of the interview questions used in this study in English language)
- Interview Questionnaire – Indonesian.docx. (Blank copy of the interview questions used in this study in Indonesian language)

Reporting guidelines

Repository: COREQ checklist for 'The future of Arabic language learning for non-Muslims as an actualization of Wasathiyah Islam in Indonesia'. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21493191.v1>.²⁵

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