

AL JAM'IYATUL WASHLIYAH AND THE TRANSMISSION OF RELIGIOUS SCIENCES IN INDONESIA FROM PRE-INDEPENDENCE TO THE REFORM ERA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategies of *Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah* in strengthening Arabic language studies as the primary foundation for the transmission of religious sciences (*'ulūm al-dīn*) from Pre-Independence to the Reform era. Employing a historical approach through library research, this study traces the madrasah curriculum at various levels—ranging from *Tajhīziyyah*, *Ibtidā'iyyah*, *Thānawīyyah*, *Qism al-Ālī*, to contemporary madrasahs—and explores Arabic-language texts as well as works of local scholars that were used as references. The findings indicate that *Al Washliyah* consistently positioned Arabic not merely as a linguistic skill but also as an epistemological instrument for understanding classical Islamic texts, preserving the *Shāfi'i* school, and reinforcing the tradition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. The curriculum was designed to emphasize the integration of linguistic sciences (*'ilm al-ālah* such as *nahw*, *ṣarf*, *balāghah*, and *mantiq*), mastery of *kitāb kuning*, and the teaching of core religious disciplines including *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *taṣawwuf*. This strategy was further reinforced through the role of *Al Washliyah* scholars (*'ulamā'*) as teachers, authors of textbooks, and producers of scholarly discourse in Arabic, thereby safeguarding the continuity of the chain of transmission (*sanad*) across generations. The study concludes that *Al Washliyah* successfully developed a distinctive model of religious sciences transmission in Indonesia by integrating Arabic language proficiency, classical *turāth*, and the demands of modern education. Consequently, the strengthening of Arabic within *Al Washliyah* is positioned as both a cultural and intellectual strategy to preserve the continuity of the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Nusantara while simultaneously addressing contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Arabic language, religious sciences (*'ulūm al-dīn*), classical Islamic texts, *Al Washliyah*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the world's major languages and has permeated Arab-Muslim thought for centuries. According to Chejne, Arabic has long been of central importance in Muslim society, as it functions as an artistic and precise expression, a religious instrument, a cultural medium, and a primary pillar of contemporary nationalism. Without Arabic, Islam could not be properly understood, since it constitutes the original and principal source of all Islamic religious sciences (Chejne, 1965). Franz Rosenthal further asserts that Arabic and its script serve as integral components of Islam. The Arabic script, even more than the language itself, has become a sacred symbol of Islam (Rosenthal, 2014).

Alhirtani also emphasizes that Arabic is the most essential science in Islamic studies, particularly in Islamic law, as students must comprehend Islamic legal

provisions in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, the two foundational sources written in Arabic. In this way, they can grasp the meaning and significance of the religion's primary texts and legal rulings (Alhirtani, 2018). For this reason, as Carl Brockelmann observed, Arabic has attained a degree of breadth and influence almost unparalleled in the history of human languages—a result of its profound role in the realms of religion, culture, and Islamic scholarship (Brockelmann, as cited in Hamzah, A.H., 2023). Kees Versteegh explains that early academic activities in Islam focused on the Qur'ān, which had to be transmitted and interpreted, both at the level of its text and its content (Versteegh, 2014). The religious rituals of Muslims in daily life are also articulated in Arabic (Shah, 2008). Thus, the position of Arabic is of paramount importance.

Kaptein explains that Arabic, as the principal language of Islam, has continued to play a central role in Indonesia. In his study, he demonstrates that among traditionalist circles, Arabic is more significant than it is among modernists, due to their differing assessments of Arabic scholarly traditions (Kaptein, 2017). Hence, traditional Islamic educational institutions such as *pesantren*, *dayah*, or *surau* teach classical Islamic texts written in Arabic, and their students study Arabic grammar in depth (Bruinesssen, 1994, 1990). Dhofier even identifies *kitāb kuning* or classical Islamic texts as one of the most essential elements of the *pesantren* (Dhofier, 1980). In many traditional Islamic institutions, students are required to study, understand, and master Arabic grammar before they begin to engage deeply with various religious subjects by directly referring to Arabic-language texts as their primary sources (Steenbrink, 1984).

In the context of modern Indonesia, *Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah* stands as one of the Islamic organizations committed to preserving various branches of knowledge, which, based on al-Attas's classification, are divided into the religious sciences, as well as the rational, intellectual, and philosophical sciences or "general knowledge" (Al-Attas, 1999, 2011). Nevertheless, this organization appears to focus more dominantly on preserving the religious sciences, particularly through the teaching of Arabic. Since its establishment in 1930 during the Dutch colonial era (Rasyidin, 2016), the organization has affirmed its commitment to the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah (Sunni Islam) (Ja'far, 2019) and the Shāfi'i school as the foundation of its struggle (Ja'far, 2016a). For this reason, the works of Sunni and Shāfi'i scholars have been introduced to Al Washliyah students from Pre-Independence through the Reform era. Arabic language has been granted a strategic position, not only as a tool of communication but also as an epistemological medium studied in order to ensure the continuity of the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Nusantara.

This article examines the strategies of Al Washliyah in strengthening Arabic language studies from Pre-Independence to the Reform era. In particular, it investigates the teaching of Arabic in Al Washliyah educational institutions and the use of Arabic texts (*kitāb kuning*) across various disciplines to deepen students' proficiency in understanding Arabic linguistic rules. The article seeks to demonstrate that Al Washliyah educational institutions—from *Tajhīziyyah*, *Ibtidā'iyyah*, *Thānawiyyah*, and *Qism al-Ālī* to universities—have consistently positioned Arabic as the most important medium within their curricula, thereby playing a vital role in preserving the continuity of Islamic tradition in the modern era.

The author argues that Al Washliyah is an Islamic organization that has consistently preserved Arabic as a language of knowledge and successfully established a distinctive model of transmitting religious sciences (*'ulūm al-dīn*) in Indonesia from the Pre-Independence era to the Reform era. This model reflects a synthesis of two elements: the mastery of Arabic as an instrumental science (*'ilm al-ālah*) and the study of *kitāb kuning* authored by classical to contemporary scholars, along with the ability to adapt and contextualize the religious sciences in response to the dynamics of contemporary society. Al Washliyah's capacity to preserve Arabic constitutes a cultural

strategy that reinforces the continuity of traditional Islamic heritage in the Nusantara, while also strengthening the organization's position within the landscape of Islamic education in contemporary Indonesia.

METHODS

This research is a library study employing a historical approach (Zed, 2018; Kuntowijoyo, 2013). In this study, the stages of historical research as outlined by Kuntowijoyo are applied consistently, namely that historical research is carried out through four steps: the heuristic stage (collecting primary and secondary data), the verification stage (assessing the authenticity of sources), the interpretation stage (interpreting the data), and the historiography stage (presenting the research findings in the form of a scholarly work).

The data obtained were analyzed by applying Krippendorff's content analysis model, which consists of six stages: unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reducing, abductively inferring, and narrating (Krippendorff, 1980). The primary data of this study consist of the curricula of Al Washliyah madrasahs and universities, spanning from the Pre-Independence era to the present day.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Al Washliyah is one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia. The organization adheres to the school of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah and the Shāfi'i madhab as the foundation of its struggle (Ja'far, 2016b). The advancement, prioritization, and dissemination of Islam have been the organization's objectives since its establishment in 1930 (Sjamsuddin, 1955). The main activities of Al Washliyah include education, da'wah, social services, economic empowerment of the Muslim community, and cadre development (Ja'far, 2020). In the field of education, Al Washliyah, since the pre-independence era, established and developed madrasahs and schools. Following Indonesia's independence, the organization went on to establish universities. These initiatives constitute Al Washliyah's efforts to nurture a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, virtuous, and committed to Islamic teachings (Siddik et al., 2023a; Siddik & Rosnita, 2014a, 2014b).

Particularly in the preservation of religious knowledge, Al Washliyah regards Arabic as an indispensable prerequisite for understanding Islam. There are three primary reasons for this: first, Arabic is the principal language of Islamic teachings; second, classical religious texts can only be accessed through mastery of Arabic; and third, Arabic serves as an essential medium for preserving the Shāfi'i madhab and Ash'arī creed. For these reasons, Al Washliyah consistently designates Arabic as the primary language of scholarly references, thereby ensuring that the authenticity and continuity of the Islamic scholarly tradition remain preserved within society.

Al Washliyah's Strategies in Strengthening Arabic Language Studies

Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah is one of the Islamic organizations that attaches great importance to the study of Arabic. This assertion rests on several arguments. First, it would be impossible for Al Washliyah to achieve the goals of its establishment without adequate mastery of Arabic, since Arabic is the principal language of Islam. Second, Al Washliyah would not be able to address religious issues without referring to classical Islamic texts, all of which are written in Arabic. Third, Al Washliyah would fail to remain an organization capable of preserving the Shāfi'i madhab and the school of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah without reading, understanding, mastering, and developing the works of scholars of both traditions, which are also written in Arabic. From this

perspective arises the question: what strategies has Al Washliyah employed to develop Arabic studies as a means of fulfilling its organizational mission?

Data indicates that Al Washliyah has adopted specific strategies for advancing Arabic studies both before and after Indonesia's independence. These strategies include the following:

- a. Establishing madrasahs. Since 1932, Al Washliyah has established madrasahs in which the fundamentals of Arabic were introduced to its students. By 1935, the organization had founded 18 madrasahs and schools. In 1942, the number increased to 193; in 1945, the total stood at 71 due to the destruction of 122 institutions during the Indonesian independence revolution (Washliyah, 1959). By 1955, Al Washliyah had 667 madrasahs and schools (Washliyah, 1955), and by 1980, the number had grown to 1,477. In 2021, Al Washliyah educational institutions were spread across 14 provinces, consisting of 234 kindergartens (Taman Kanak-kanak), 81 elementary schools (Sekolah Dasar), 96 Madrasah Ibtidā'iyyah (MI), 48 junior high schools (Sekolah Menengah Pertama), 138 Madrasah Thānawiyah (MTs), 12 senior high schools (Sekolah Menengah Atas), 28 vocational schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan), and 67 Madrasah Aliyah (MA). The total amounted to 704 institutions, spread across Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Bali. Al Washliyah also established nine institutions of higher education, comprising four universities and five colleges.
- b. Establishing a university. With the growth of madrasah alumni, Al Washliyah began to envision a university, which materialized with the founding of Universitas Al Washliyah on May 18, 1958 (Riza, 2021). This university was established by Al Washliyah scholars who were deeply concerned with religious sciences, including Arabic. Admission to the university required proficiency in Arabic and the ability to access the *kitāb kuning* (classical Islamic texts).
- c. Designing madrasah curricula emphasizing religious sciences, including Arabic (Asari, 2019). The Al Washliyah madrasah curriculum ratified in 1956 demonstrates the centrality of Arabic instruction. At the Madrasah Ibtidā'iyyah level, Arabic subjects were strongly emphasized, with compulsory courses in *al-Lughah*, *al-Muḥādathah*, *al-Inshā'*, *al-Nahw*, and *al-Ṣarf*. At the Madrasah Thānawiyah level, students were required to study *al-Balāghah*, *al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah*, and *al-Nahw*. At the Madrasah al-Qism al-‘Ālī level, formal Arabic courses were no longer offered, as students were expected to have already mastered Arabic and become capable of engaging directly with Arabic texts. To acquire mastery, they studied classical works on Arabic linguistics, such as *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah*, *al-Muṭāla‘ah al-Hadīthah*, *Lughah al-Takhātūb al-Muṣawwarah*, *Muḥādathah al-Awwaliyah*, *al-Qirā‘ah al-Rāshidah*, *Madārij al-Inshā'*, *Qawā‘id al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah*, and *Jawāhir al-Balāghah*.
- d. Employing the *kitāb kuning* as core textbooks (Ja’far, 2017). For instance, students at the Madrasah al-Qism al-‘Ālī level studied *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *Qawā‘id al-Fiqhīyah*, *taṣawwuf*, and Islamic history (*tārīkh*). They engaged with prominent works such as *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta’wīl*, *Sahīh Muslim*, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Naṣā’ir*, *al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyah*, *Muḥādarah Tārīkh Ummāt Islāmīyah*, *al-Mahallī*, *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Haqā‘iq al-Ta’wīl*, *Tanwīr al-Miqbās*, and *Lubāb al-Ta’wīl fī Ma‘ānī al-Tanzīl*. This enabled Al Washliyah students to further refine their proficiency in Arabic.
- e. Appointing scholars (*‘ulamā’*) as teachers (Ja’far, 2022a). Al Washliyah educational institutions, both madrasahs and universities, appointed scholars as instructors for their students. These scholars possessed strong command of Arabic, enabling them to teach religious sciences directly from Arabic texts and

kitāb kuning. Some of them had studied in the Middle East, while others were graduates of Al Washliyah's own madrasahs.

- f. Producing Arabic writings by Al Washliyah scholars (Ja'far, 2022b). Several Al Washliyah scholars authored works in Arabic, including M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, Adnan Lubis, Nukman Sulaiman, M. Husein Abdul Karim, and Hamdan Abbas. Their Arabic writings also served as reading materials for their students.

In summary, Al Washliyah has paid considerable attention to the strengthening of Arabic, adopting specific strategies to develop Arabic studies. Arabic was taught to students from the elementary level, and by the secondary level they were required to have mastered the language in order to engage with Arabic texts in their religious studies. Teachers in Al Washliyah institutions were proficient in Arabic and capable of teaching religious sciences using the *kitāb kuning*. Some of them even authored works in Arabic. Furthermore, Al Washliyah designed a curriculum grounded in the *kitāb kuning*. All of these efforts were undertaken to fulfill the organization's mission: to advance, prioritize, and disseminate Islam.

Arabic Language and Religious Sciences in Al Washliyah Madrasahs

From the Pre-Independence era to the period of independence, Al Washliyah administered both madrasahs and schools. The types of madrasahs managed by Al Washliyah included Madrasah Tajhīziyyah (preparatory), Madrasah Ibtidā'iyyah (elementary), Madrasah Thānawiyah (intermediate), and Madrasah Qism al-Ālī (upper secondary). In addition, Al Washliyah also operated Sekolah Rakyat (SR, people's schools) and Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP, junior high schools). By 1951, the total number of madrasahs and schools managed by Al Washliyah had reached 440 units (Sjihab, 1951). The number of Al Washliyah educational institutions continued to grow in the subsequent periods.

1) Madrasah Tajhīziyyah

Tajhīziyyah Madrasah represents one of the types of madrasahs administered by Al Washliyah since the Pre-Independence era. This madrasah lasted for two years and functioned as a basic-level institution. Its curriculum was designed to provide knowledge of the fundamentals of religion for very young students, while also introducing several general skills. Religious sciences received a greater portion than general knowledge. Teachers and students relied on *kitāb* written in Arabic-Malay script authored by Al Washliyah scholars.

The teachers of this madrasah taught subjects on the fundamentals of reading and writing, as well as religious sciences. The lesson of *al-Qirā'ah* utilized *Hijā'iyah I* and *II* by A. Rahman Ond. to train basic reading ability. Meanwhile, Arabic writing skills (*al-Khatṭ*) and *Imlā'* exercises were taught using textbooks written by teachers. To enrich vocabulary, students studied *Mufradāt al-Lughah* by H. Ibrāhīm Latif. The lesson of *al-Tajwīd* employed *Pelajaran Tajwīd* by M. Arsjad Th. Lubis to introduce the rules of Qur'ānic recitation. In Qur'ān lessons, students were required to master the recitation from Juz I to Juz V.

In addition, students were introduced to the fundamentals of Islam. *Al-'Ibādah* was taught through *Istindjā'*, *Sembahyang dengan Praktik*, and *Pelajaran 'Ibadat* by M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, which emphasized practical aspects of worship. The field of creed ('*aqīdah* or *tawhīd*) was delivered through *Pelajaran Īmān* by the same author. Islamic history was studied in the subject *al-Tārīkh*, with the textbook *Riwayat Nabi Muhammad s.a.w.* by M. Arsjad Th. Lubis.

Beyond Islamic subjects, students were also provided with general knowledge and skills. The subject *Membaca Latin* used *Tiga Sekawan I, II, III*, while *Menulis Latin*

used textbooks written by teachers. For arithmetic, students used *Gemar Berhitung I* and *II*. They also studied the Indonesian language.

The curriculum of *Tajhīziyyah* was designed not only to instill foundational religious and linguistic knowledge, but also to highlight the importance, according to Al Washliyah, of introducing the basics of Arabic language and script to students from an early age. This served as preparation for their later engagement with Arabic-language texts. Similarly, the teachers wrote textbooks in Malay using Arabic script. These works were not merely technical materials but also functioned as learning media that combined linguistic mastery with knowledge of Islamic disciplines. It is evident that Al Washliyah positioned the Arabic language as the gateway to understanding religious texts. Students at the *Tajhīziyyah* level, in addition to studying religious sciences through teacher-authored works written in Arabic script, were also trained and accustomed to engaging with Arabic-script texts, so that in the future they would be better prepared to access Arabic-language sources.

2) Madrasah Ibtidā'iyah

The next type of Al Washliyah madrasah is Madrasah Ibtidā'iyah. The first subject taught was *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah*, which encompassed aspects of language, conversation, *insyā'* (composition), and text comprehension. The textbooks used included *Durūs al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah*, *al-Qirā'at al-Rāshidah*, *al-Muṭāla'ah al-Hadīthah*, *Lughah al-Tukhtab al-Muṣawwarah*, *Muḥādathāt al-Awwaliyah*, *Ta'lim al-Insyā'*, and *Madārij al-Insyā'*. This subject aimed to enable students to comprehend, speak, and write in Arabic proficiently.

In addition, linguistic sciences such as *al-Nāḥw* and *al-Ṣarf* were also emphasized, using classical works such as *Matan al-Jurumiyah*, *Fuṣūl al-Fikrīyah*, *Mutammimah*, *Amthilat al-Mukhtalifah*, *Matan al-Binā'*, and *Matan al-Maqṣūd*. These studies strengthened students' command of Arabic grammar and morphology. Complementary subjects such as *al-Imlā'* (dictation) and *al-Khaṭṭ* (calligraphy) further supported literacy skills.

Students also deepened their understanding of religious sciences through various religious subjects. For *fiqh*, they studied *Matan al-Taqrīb* and *Fath al-Qarīb*. For *tawhīd*, they used *al-'Aqīdat al-Dīniyah*, *Kifāyat al-'Awām*, and *al-Dusūqī 'alā Umm al-Barāhīn*. Ethics (*akhlāq*) were studied through *Taysīr al-Akhlāq*, *Waṣāyā al-Ābā' li al-Abnā'*, and *Adab al-Fatā*. Meanwhile, the Qur'ān, *tajwīd*, and *al-Mahfūzāt* (memorization texts) became central to spiritual reinforcement, with references such as *Hidāyat al-Mustafīd* (*tajwīd*), *Nūr al-Yaqīn* (history), *al-Muntahāb* (for memorization), *Khulāsat Nūr al-Yaqīn* (history), and *al-Naba' al-Yaqīn* (history). Additional disciplines included *balāghah*, *ma'nā al-Qur'ān*, and *ḥadīth*. Students referred to classical works such as *Risālah fī al-Isti'ārah*, *Dardīr*, and *Matan Jawhar al-Maknūn* for rhetoric, and *al-Arba'īn* by Imām al-Nawawī for *ḥadīth*.

Although the curriculum focused heavily on religious sciences, students also studied several general subjects, such as arithmetic with *Gemar Berhitung* and *Sendi Hitungan*, geography and Indonesian history, as well as the Indonesian language. This ensured that they acquired not only religious knowledge but also linguistic competence and general education, providing a strong foundation for further studies.

Based on the above, the subjects and textbooks studied in Al Washliyah madrasahs were not solely oriented toward mastery of religious sciences but also emphasized Arabic language proficiency from an early stage. Arabic was regarded as the primary gateway to accessing the vast corpus of Islamic scholarship. Thus, from the beginning, students were equipped with Arabic-language textbooks, both in linguistic sciences and religious disciplines, to cultivate their reading, writing, and speaking skills. Linguistic tools such as *nāḥw* and *ṣarf* were introduced early through

classical texts to strengthen students' understanding of Arabic grammar and structure. They were then guided to access Arabic texts, particularly in *fiqh*, *tawḥīd*, *akhlāq*, *tafsīr*, and *ḥadīth*. It can therefore be concluded that Al Washliyah positioned Arabic as the core language of its curriculum, with the ultimate aim of enabling students to comprehend classical Islamic texts.

3) Madrasah Thānawiyah

Al Washliyah also administered Madrasah Thānawiyah, which taught both religious and general knowledge (or the rational, intellectual and philosophical sciences), although religious subjects remained dominant. Knowledge of Arabic structure and grammar continued to receive primary attention. Arabic was given serious focus, with students studying *Qirā'at al-Rāshidah III-IV*, *Qawā'id al-Lughah*, and *Qawā'id al-Fiqhīyah*. Arabic grammar (*nāḥū*) was further reinforced through *Qawā'id al-Lughah al-`Arabīyah*, while rhetoric (*balāghah*) was taught using *Qawā'id al-Lughah al-`Arabīyah* and *Jawāhir al-Balāghah*.

Alongside their Arabic studies, students accessed Arabic-language *kitāb* across various religious disciplines. The first was *tafsīr*, with the primary reference being *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Mahallī. *Hadīth* was studied through *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* and *al-Arba`īn al-Nawawīyah*, focusing on ethics, worship, and social conduct. Applied *hadīth* studies were supported by *Manīḥat al-Mughīth* by Ḥāfiẓ Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī and *Sharḥ Bāyqūnīyah* by Muḥammad al-Zuqānī. In *fiqh*, students relied on *Tuhfat al-Tullāb* by Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, while *aqīdah* was deepened through *Huṣūn al-Hamīdiyah*. The subject of ethics (*akhlāq*) was taught using *Maw'izat al-Mu'minīn* by Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Dimashqī. To strengthen the foundation of Islamic law, students studied *uṣūl al-fiqh* with *al-Waraqāt* by Aḥmad al-Dimyāṭī and *al-Luma'* by Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī. In the field of *farā'id* (inheritance law), *Fath al-Bā'is* was used. Islamic history was studied with *Nūr al-Yaqīn* and *Itmām al-Wafā'*, while logic (*manṭiq*) was taught using *Ilm al-Manṭiq* by M. Nūr Ibrāhīmī.

Beyond religious subjects, students at the Thānawiyah level also studied general knowledge such as Indonesian language, English (*Elementary English I-III*), natural sciences, civics, geography, as well as Indonesian and world history. However, general knowledge did not occupy a large portion of the curriculum.

Thus, the Thānawiyah curriculum at Al Washliyah placed greater emphasis on mastery of classical texts and the Arabic language. Arabic instruction at the Thānawiyah level had two main purposes: first, to strengthen students' comprehension of Islamic texts, and second, to deepen their competence in the Arabic language itself.

4) Madrasah Qism al-`Ālī

The highest-level madrasah administered by Al Washliyah was Madrasah Qism al-`Ālī, first established in 1940. Education at this madrasah lasted for three years. Many of its alumni continued their studies at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Even into the post-independence era, this madrasah consistently taught religious sciences through Arabic-language *kitāb*. At this stage, students were no longer taught Arabic language skills, since they were already expected to be capable of reading, comprehending, and interpreting Arabic texts. Consequently, the focus was placed solely on religious sciences.

Tafsīr and *hadīth* constituted the primary subjects at this level. In *tafsīr*, students engaged with classical works such as *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl* by Qādī Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Baydāwī, *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī Ma`ānī al-Tanzīl* by `Alā' al-Dīn `Ālī Muḥammad al-Khāzinī, *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl* by Abū al-Barakāt al-Naṣafī, and *Tanwīr al-Miqbās* (*Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās*) by Abū Ṭāhir al-Fayrūzābādī. Alongside *tafsīr*,

students also studied *ḥadīth* intensively, with a particular focus on *Sahīh Muslim* and *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*.

Other disciplines included *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *qawā'id al-fiqhīyah*, *taṣawwuf*, history, and comparative religion. *Fiqh* was studied through *al-Maḥallī* by Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, while *uṣūl al-fiqh* was taught with *Sharḥ al-Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī 'alā Jam' al-Jawāmi'* by Ibn al-Subkī. Students also studied *qawā'id al-fiqhīyah* using *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. The subject of *taṣawwuf* was taught through *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyah*. Islamic history was studied using *Muḥādarat Tārikh Ummāt al-Islāmīyah* by al-Khudārī Bey, while comparative religion relied on the work *Yahūdī wa Naṣrānī*. Debating skills were trained through *al-Walādīyah* by Muḥammad al-Mar'ashī.

No general knowledge (or the rational, intellectual and philosophical sciences) was included at this level. Thus, Madrasah Qism al-‘Ālī sought to produce graduates capable of accessing Arabic texts across a wide range of Islamic disciplines, preparing them to become scholars ('ulamā'), teachers, and religious leaders within society.

Advancements in Arabic Language and Religious Sciences in Later Times

As an Islamic organization, Al Washliyah has consistently preserved the study of the Arabic language. Students continue to engage in acquiring knowledge of Arabic while also deepening their understanding of the religious sciences by referring to texts written in Arabic or in the Arabic script (*Arab-Malay*). Al Washliyah maintains its earlier strategies, which reflects the continuity of traditional Islamic scholarship that positions Arabic as the principal instrument in intellectual discourse.

Arabic Language and Islamic Religious Sciences in MDTA Al Washliyah

The lowest level of Al Washliyah madrasah is Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliyah Awwaliyah (MDTA). This madrasah accepts students from elementary schools who study general sciences in the morning. In the afternoon, these students study religious sciences through MDTA. This institution emphasizes mastery of the fundamentals of language and religious sciences by making Arabic and *Jawi* script (*Arab-Malay*) the essential knowledge that every student must acquire. Students are introduced to Arabic texts (*kutub*). The use of texts in MDTA Al Washliyah stresses two main aspects: first, mastery of Arabic as the language of religion and knowledge; and second, strengthening Islamic understanding through authoritative classical works (Siddik et al., 2023b).

MDTA Al Washliyah consists of four levels/classes. In the first level, the texts used are *Bintang Lima I* by Nukman Sulaiman and *Lughat al-‘Arabiyyah* by Adnan Yahya. Entering the second level, the literature becomes more diverse, such as *Pelajaran ‘Ibadah* and *Pelajaran Iman* by M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, which emphasize the fundamentals of *‘aqīdah* and worship, *Bintang Lima II* by Nukman Sulaiman, which continues Arabic language mastery, as well as *al-Tashrīf al-Wādīh*, Vol. I, by Muhammed Husein ‘Abd al-Karīm, which teaches *sarf* rules as the foundation for scientific understanding of Arabic.

In the third level, students study various texts covering significant disciplines in the Islamic tradition. For *nāḥw*, they use *Qawā'id Nahwiyyah* by M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, while *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah*, Vol. II, by Maḥmud Yunus is used to deepen Arabic language acquisition. The field of theology (*tawhīd*) is taught through *Kifāyah al-Mubtadi' fi ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, Vol. I, by Muhammed Husein ‘Abd al-Karīm, whereas moral education derives from *Akhlaq al-Banīn*, Vol. I, by ‘Umar ibn Aḥmad Baraja. To understand the Qur'an, students use *Khulāsah Tafsīr* by Nukman Sulaiman, while the study of *fiqh* is based on the classical text *Matan al-Ghāyah wa al-Taqrīb* by Abū Shu‘ayb ibn Husein al-İsfahānī. Arabic morphology (*sarf*) is reinforced with *al-Tashrīf al-Wādīh*,

Vol. II, by Muhammad Ḥusein ‘Abd al-Karīm, Qur’anic recitation (*tajwīd*) is studied through *Hidāyah al-Mustafid* by Maḥmud Yunus, and Islamic history is learned from *Khulāṣah Nūr al-Yaqīn*, Vol. I, by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Jabbār.

At the fourth level, students study a number of texts that further enhance their Arabic skills while broadening their Islamic understanding. For *ṣarf*, they use either *al-Tashrīf al-Wādīh*, Vol. II, by Muhammad Ḥusein ‘Abd al-Karīm or *Qawā’id al-Ṣarf* by the same author, while theology is taught through *Kifāyah al-Mubtadi’ fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, Vol. II. The study of *nāḥw* is based on *al-Nāḥw al-Wādīh fī Qawā’id al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah* by ‘Alī al-Jazam Muṣṭafā Āmīn, while Arabic is deepened with *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah*, Vol. II, by Maḥmud Yunus. The field of *fiqh* continues to rely on *Matan al-Ghāyah wa al-Taqrīb* by Abū Shuja‘ ibn Ḥusein al-Isfahānī, while Islamic history is taught through *Khulāṣah Nūr al-Yaqīn*, Vol. II, by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Jabbār. For ḥadīth, students study *Matan Arba‘īn* by Imām al-Nawawī, moral formation is taught through *Akhlaq al-Banīn*, Vol. II, by ‘Umar ibn Ahmad Baraja, and Qur’anic understanding through *Khulāṣah Tafsīr* by Nukman Sulaiman.

In the fifth level, the literature used places even greater emphasis on the deepening of religious sciences as well as advanced mastery of Arabic. For *ṣarf*, students use *al-Tashrīf al-Wādīh*, Vol. III, by Muhammad Ḥusein ‘Abd al-Karīm, while *‘ilm al-kalām* is taught through *Kifāyah al-Mubtadi’ fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, Vol. III, by the same author. *Nāḥw* is reinforced with the classical text *Matan Ājurrūmiyah* by al-Ṣanhājī, and practical Arabic is continued with *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah*, Vol. III, by Maḥmud Yunus. In *fiqh*, students still refer to *Matan al-Ghāyah wa al-Taqrīb* by Abū Shuja‘ ibn Ḥusein al-Isfahānī, while Islamic history is taught through *Khulāṣah Nūr al-Yaqīn*, Vol. III, by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Jabbār. For ḥadīth, they study *Matan Arba‘īn* by Imām al-Nawawī, moral education is derived from *Akhlaq al-Banīn*, Vol. III, by ‘Umar ibn Ahmad Baraja, and Qur’anic understanding is gained through *Khulāṣah Tafsīr* by Nukman Sulaiman. Through these texts, fifth-level MDTA Al Washliyah students are prepared with a more mature foundation of knowledge, both in linguistic and Islamic aspects.

The curriculum at MDTA Al Washliyah places Islamic texts as well as Arabic language literature (*nāḥw*, *ṣarf*, and *lughah*) at the core of learning. Mastery of Arabic is not only a means to understand Islamic texts but also a goal of learning itself, enabling students to explore the Islamic intellectual tradition while strengthening their Arabic competence. All texts used are essentially in Arabic, with only a small portion in Arab-Malay. Such a pattern of text utilization has a clear pedagogical purpose, namely training students from an early age to read, understand, and familiarize themselves with Arabic texts, both classical and modern. Thus, the students’ Arabic proficiency is not limited to theoretical mastery but is also sharpened through direct interaction with texts.

On the other hand, the texts used are entirely written by scholars affiliated with the Shāfi‘ī school and Ash‘arī theology, indicating that Al Washliyah’s intellectual orientation is clearly within the framework of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah. Some of these works are authored by Al Washliyah scholars themselves, such as M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, Nukman Sulaiman, and Muhammad Ḥusein ‘Abd al-Karīm, who composed texts tailored to local educational needs. Others, however, are by major scholars from the Middle East, such as *Matan Arba‘īn* by Imām al-Nawawī and *Matan al-Ghāyah wa al-Taqrīb* by Abū Shuja‘ ibn Ḥusein al-Isfahānī. The use of both local and global scholarly works demonstrates the continuity of intellectual tradition and the connection between Al Washliyah’s scholarship and the broader heritage of Islam at the global level.

Arabic Language and Islamic Religious Sciences in Madrasah Thānawiyyah and Madrasah Qism al-‘Ālī

The madrasahs managed by *Al Jam‘iyatul Washliyah* possess a distinctive character that emphasizes mastery of Arabic as the language of knowledge and proficiency in classical texts (*turāth*). At both the Madrasah Thānawiyyah and the Madrasah Aliyah (Qism al-‘Ālī), students are introduced to and trained in reading, understanding, and critically engaging with Arabic texts. Hence, Arabic becomes the key to unlocking the Islamic intellectual heritage transmitted from generation to generation.

At the Thānawiyyah level, students devote themselves to the study of the Arabic language while also exploring various branches of the religious sciences, all of which are based on Arabic texts. At this stage, they are taught works on Arabic grammar such as *Ta‘lim al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah* and *al-Taṣrīf al-Wādīh*. The purpose is to enhance their knowledge of Arabic grammar.

Alongside their study of the Arabic language, students in the Madrasah Thānawiyyah engage with various branches of the religious sciences. In the field of *tafsīr*, they study *Tafsīr Jalālayn*. Ḥadīth sciences are taught through *Bulūgh al-Marām* and *Iṣtilāḥāt al-Muḥaddithīn*. In the field of *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, they study *Tuhfat al-Tullāb*, *Matan Rahbiyyah*, *al-Uṣūl min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*, and *al-Qawā‘id al-Fiqhiyyah*. In theology (‘aqīdah), they examine *al-Husūn al-Hamīdiyyah*. Moral cultivation is reinforced through *Maw‘izat al-Mu‘minīn*, while critical reasoning is sharpened through *‘Ilm al-Manṭiq*. Both local and global scholarly works are employed as their main references.

Students of Madrasah Thānawiyyah Al Washliyah typically continue their studies at the Madrasah Aliyah (Qism al-‘Ālī). To perfect the knowledge of students at the Qism al-‘Ālī level, they continue to receive lessons in *nāḥw* and *ṣarf*. The grammar texts they consult include *al-Kaylānī* and *al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah*. Senior students are also introduced to *Jawāhir al-Balāghah* in order to study the art of Arabic rhetoric. In addition, they gain access to Arabic texts across the various branches of the religious sciences. Notably, *Tafsīr Jalālayn* remains their primary reference in *tafsīr*. In ḥadīth, they study *Jawāhir al-Bukhārī*, while in *fiqh*, they explore *Minhāj al-Tālibīn* by Imām al-Nawawī. The study of *qawā‘id al-fiqhiyyah* is continued through *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā‘ir*, while *uṣūl al-fiqh* is deepened with *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Khalaf. In the study of *taṣawwuf* and ethics, they continue to use *Maw‘izat al-Mu‘minīn*. To enrich their philosophical reasoning, students study *‘Ilm al-Manṭiq*. At the same time, they are introduced to *al-Sharqāwī ‘alā al-Hudā*, which broadens their perspective in *‘ilm al-kalām*, as well as *Itmām al-Wafā* in the study of history.

Thus, the curriculum of Al Washliyah madrasahs places Arabic at the core of the entire learning process. Arabic is taught technically through reference to key texts in *nāḥw* and *ṣarf*, and then applied directly through the study of Arabic texts in various religious disciplines, especially *tafsīr*, ḥadīth, *fiqh*, *taṣawwuf*, and *kalām*. Mastery of Arabic does not stand independently but is instead integrated into the broader study of the religious sciences.

Arabic Language and Islamic Religious Sciences in UNIVA Medan

Up to the contemporary era, Al Washliyah manages ten institutions of higher education. The oldest among them is Universitas Al Washliyah (UNIVA) Medan, established in 1958. The primary objective of this university was to prepare future scholars and intellectuals of Al Washliyah (Universitas Al-Washliyah, 1988). At present, the Faculty of Islamic Studies at UNIVA Medan offers a study program in Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*, PAI), which also includes a special cadre-development class for prospective ‘ulamā’. The purpose of this class is to produce graduates who embody the intellectual character and worldview of ‘ulamā’. Among the indicators of such

graduates are their ability to read and comprehend Arabic texts proficiently and their mastery of the religious sciences based on the *kitāb kuning* (UNIVA Medan, 2022).

To achieve these goals, a curriculum was designed with a foundation in Arabic texts. Students are strongly encouraged to master the Arabic language. Accordingly, they study classical works on *nāhū*, *ṣarf*, and *balāghah*. Among their references are *Matan al-Ajurru'miyah* and *Izhār al-Asrār fī al-Nāhū*, which equip students with the fundamentals of Arabic grammar. *Sharh Ibn 'Aqīl* provides an in-depth analysis of grammatical rules with practical applications. In the area of *ṣarf*, students study *Matn al-Binā' wa al-Asās fī 'Ilm al-Ṣarf* and *Talkhiṣ Sharh Matn al-Binā' wa al-Asās fī 'Ilm al-Ṣarf*. These works are deemed essential for students to memorize the foundational rules of Arabic linguistics and to apply them in understanding the *kitāb kuning*.

To reinforce their knowledge of Arabic, students at UNIVA Medan engage with various branches of religious sciences by referring to the *kitāb kuning* authored by scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah and the Shāfi'i school. They study *Tafsīr Jalālayn* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Mahallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī, as well as *Safwat al-Tafāsīr* by Muḥammad 'Ālī al-Ṣābūnī. Additionally, they examine *al-Qawā'id al-Asāsiyyah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. In the field of ḥadīth, students are introduced to *Bulūgh al-Marām* by Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī and *Subul al-Salām*. To strengthen their foundation in ḥadīth studies, they learn *Taysīr Muṣṭalah al-Ḥadīth* and *Iṣtilāhāt al-Muḥaddithīn*. As an introduction, they also study *Matan al-Arba'īn al-Nawawīyyah*. In the field of *farā'id*, their knowledge is reinforced through *Takmilah Zubdah al-Ḥadīth fī Fiqh al-Mawārīth*, which links ḥadīth with the law of inheritance.

Students also study various branches of Islamic law and thought. In *fiqh*, they refer to *Matan Ghayah wa al-Taqrīb* and *al-Fiqh al-Islāmī wa Adillatuh* by Wahbah al-Zuhaylī. In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, they are introduced to *al-Uṣūl min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* and *al-Wādīh fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khallāf. In the field of theology ('aqīdah), they consult *Kifāyat al-Mubtadi'* and *Faṭḥ al-Majīd*, while in *taṣawwuf* they study *Sharh al-Hikam* and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. The text *Tārīkh Tashrī' al-Islāmī* by Khuḍārī Bik also serves as a reference to enhance students' understanding of the historical development of Islamic law.

Based on this curriculum, UNIVA Medan has designed and implemented a *kitāb kuning*-based program that makes both classical and modern scholarly works mandatory references for its students. Arabic truly functions as the language of knowledge. Each text not only teaches its respective discipline but also hones students' ability to directly access Arabic texts. In this way, Al Washliyah contributes to the continuity of the tradition of *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* through the medium of Arabic texts. The ultimate goal is to produce graduates who embody the intellectual character of 'ulamā'—capable of reading, understanding, and critically engaging with Arabic texts, while also transmitting knowledge of the various branches of religious sciences to the Muslim community in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that *Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah*, from Pre-Independence to the Reform era, consistently positioned Arabic as the primary foundation for the transmission of religious sciences in Indonesia. Mastery of Arabic was regarded not merely as a linguistic skill, but as an epistemological instrument enabling students to understand classical texts, deepen their knowledge of the Shāfi'i school, and uphold the tradition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah (Sunni Islam). This strategy was implemented through madrasah curricula at various levels—from *Tajhīziyyah*, *Ibtidā'iyyah*, *Thanāwiyyah*, and *Qism al-'Ālī* to higher education—which emphasized the integration of linguistic sciences (*nāhū*, *ṣarf*, *balāghah*, *manṭiq*), mastery of *kitāb kuning*, and instruction in

religious disciplines such as *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *taṣawwuf*. At the same time, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic education in Indonesia by demonstrating that Al Washliyah's strategy of strengthening Arabic was not merely technical, but also cultural and intellectual. This educational orientation, rooted in Arabic linguistic mastery, not only shaped the structure of Al Washliyah's curriculum but also defined its intellectual identity within Indonesia's Islamic educational landscape.

Arabic was positioned as a cultural strategy that reinforced Islamic scholarly authority, ensured the continuity of intellectual *sanad*, and created space for adaptation to the demands of modernity. Furthermore, this study provides a new framework for understanding the relationship between language, curriculum, and scholarly authority, as well as how a local Islamic organization is able to respond to changing times without losing its traditional roots. It affirms that Al Washliyah's strategy for strengthening Arabic is not only part of an educational system, but also a civilizational project that sustains the continuity of the Sunni Islamic tradition in the Nusantara, while simultaneously reinforcing Sunni scholarly identity among students of Generation Z.

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges its limitations. By employing a historical, library-based approach, it relies heavily on written sources, leaving less explored the practical dimensions—such as students' learning experiences, classroom teaching methods, and the dynamics of teacher-student interaction. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct ethnographic studies that investigate the practice of Arabic and *kitāb kuning* instruction, both in formal educational settings such as Al Washliyah madrasahs and universities, and in non-formal institutions such as study circles (*pengajian*) and religious assemblies (*majelis ta'lim*).

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