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Arabic Language and Religious Identity: Challenges of Globalization in the Modern Era.

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Abstract

In the midst of the dominance of global languages like English and the shift from fus-ha to 'amiyah, the Arabic language faces existential challenges. This study emphasizes the importance of preservation strategies through curriculum and digital technology. Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an, holds a central position in shaping the religious identity of Muslims worldwide. However, the era of globalization presents significant challenges to its sustainability, particularly due to the global dominance of English in the realms of science, technology, and media, as well as the increasing shift from standard Arabic (fus-ha) to local dialects ('amiyah). This study explores these challenges through a qualitative literature review, integrating linguistic, sociocultural, and technological perspectives. The findings reveal that while Arabic remains a core symbol of Islamic religious identity, it faces pressures from linguistic hybridization, educational transitions, and technological marginalization. Nonetheless, globalization also presents opportunities through the proliferation of Arabic-based digital media, online education, and language learning applications. Strategic efforts to preserve Arabic include curriculum strengthening, technological integration, and global cultural promotion. This study underscores the enduring relevance of Arabic not only as a medium of religious expression but also as a vehicle for sustaining Islamic values and cultural heritage in a rapidly evolving global context.

Keywords: *Arabic Language; Religious Identity; Globalization; Digital Era; Linguistic Preservation*

Introduction

Arabic, as the language of revelation of the Qur'an, has a very important position in the Islamic tradition. As a language spoken by more than a billion Muslims worldwide, Arabic is not only a means of everyday communication, but also a symbol of deep religious identity and spirituality. According to Suleiman (2003), "Arabic has a unique position in building Muslim identity, not only as a means of communication but also as an irreplaceable religious and cultural symbol. As the

language of the Qur'an, Arabic has become a religious marker that binds Muslims globally." Therefore, efforts to strengthen the teaching and use of the Arabic language in various educational institutions need to be increased so that future generations can understand and appreciate the cultural heritage and the values contained in it. To achieve this goal, collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the Muslim community is essential in designing a curriculum that is relevant and engaging for students.

According to Crystal (2003) "Arabic faces great challenges in the era of globalization, including the dominance of international languages such as English. However, Arabic remains a strong symbol of religious and cultural identity, particularly in the daily worship practices of Muslims." By understanding these challenges, it is important that we develop innovative strategies in Arabic language teaching, including leveraging digital technologies and online resources that can reach a wider audience.

However, in the era of rapidly growing globalization, the Arabic language is faced with a major challenge in maintaining its role as a symbol of religious identity. Globalization, which has led to increased interconnectedness between the nations of the world through technology, economy, and culture, has had a profound impact on the use of language in the public sphere, both directly and indirectly.

Ali Mahsun (2013) The influence of globalization not only causes a transformation in world civilization through the process of modernization, industrialization, and information revolution, but also causes several changes in the structure of life in various fields, both in the social, cultural, economic, political and educational fields. This raises an important question: how can the Arabic language, which has been a symbol of religious identity, remain relevant and able to survive in the midst of modernization and globalization? The study of Arabic not only provides an understanding of religious texts, but also develops an appreciation for the beauty and grammar of this language. With this dual engagement, individuals can have a deeper connection to cultural heritage and can confront an increasingly connected world. The challenge is to integrate Arabic into the contemporary context so that it remains a living language amid the influence of globalization.

At the social level, Arabic is now not only practiced in the context of worship, but also in many other areas of life, including education, media, and technology. However, the use of Arabic in this realm has not always developed along with global developments. The use of *fus-ha* (standard Arabic) which is considered more formal and religious has now declined significantly, being replaced by *'amiyah* (local dialect) or even foreign languages, especially English. As Ferguson (1959) notes, "Arabic experiences a phenomenon of diglossia, in which there is a considerable distance between formal language (*fus-ha*) and colloquialism (local dialect), which implies a loss of linguistic unity in religious and social practice." In this case, Arabic is often seen only as a language for religious rituals, not as the language of everyday life. These changes demonstrate the challenges faced by Muslim communities in maintaining the use of *fus-ha*, while also reflecting the social and cultural dynamics that continue to evolve along with globalization. This shift creates gaps in language understanding and use, which can result in the younger generation losing attachment to their cultural heritage and identity.

Globalization not only has an impact on the Arabic language in the context of cross-cultural communication, but also introduces technological challenges. The rapid development of information and communication technology, which increasingly dominates the digital space, often leaves the

Arabic language aside. Many global digital platforms, including search engines and social media, prioritize the English language, which increases the difficulty for native Arabic speakers to access global content.

According to Al-Tamimi (2021), "Technological limitations in supporting the Arabic language are leading to a decline in the competitiveness of this language in the digital space, creating gaps in information accessibility and opportunities." In this case, Arabic faces a major challenge in facing the dominance of international languages in the digital era.

Language can have a religious identity just like Arabic because Arabic is considered the language of the Qur'an and the Islamic faith (Morrow & Castleton, 2007). Morrow & Castleton asserts that "in the Arab-Islamic world, both the Arabic language and the Muslim faith are often seen as an integral part of the same Muslim identity."

Furthermore, modernization and globalization also affect the perception of the Arabic language. In many countries, especially outside the Arab world, Arabic is often seen as a "traditional" or "ancient" language that is irrelevant to the needs of the modern world. This is especially felt among the younger generation, who tend to be more interested in international or more globally dominant languages such as English. As Rahman (2007) puts it, "Arabic is often seen as a language of worship and religion, not as a language for intellectualism or career development in the modern world." In fact, Arabic has great potential to become a scientific and technological language that can be used in various disciplines, so it is important to maintain and develop this language to remain relevant.

According to Morrow & Castleton, (2007) In the case of Arabic, the issue of globalization is not only a matter of free trade, economics and technological advancement. There is a deeper dimension of globalization in Arab-Muslim countries. It is almost impossible to separate Arabic from Islam because Arabic is the language of the Qur'an. The supreme rulers of the past were aware of the influence of Arabic. They fought against it and tried to replace it with their own language"

In addition to the challenges faced, globalization also brings opportunities for the Arabic language. In this digital era, Arabic-based religious and educational content is growing, even in more modern formats, such as da'wah videos, online courses, and Arabic language learning applications. As stated by Abou Zeinab (2020), "Digital media provides a great opportunity to promote the Arabic language globally, both in religious and academic contexts." This, the challenge of globalization to the Arabic language not only brings a threat, but also paves the way for innovations that can strengthen the position of the Arabic language as a symbol of religious identity in the modern world.

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by the Arabic language in the face of globalization, with a focus on its impact on religious identity. This approach will use literature studies that link linguistic, sociological, and cultural theories to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of the Arabic language in the modern era and globalization. The problem statement in this research is how the Arabic language can maintain its role as a symbol of religious identity amidst the pressures of globalization.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a focus on literature review as the primary method of data collection and analysis. The research aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by the Arabic language in the context of globalization, particularly in relation to its role in

shaping and maintaining religious identity. The literature review involves a systematic and critical examination of scholarly sources, including academic journal articles, books, research reports, and other credible publications that discuss Arabic language, religious identity, globalization, and sociolinguistic change in the Arab world. Literature is selected based on topic relevance, recency (last 10 years), and academic quality (peer-reviewed).

Following Fink (2019), this literature review adopts a structured and reproducible approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing previous studies relevant to the research topic. Content analysis is applied to extract recurring themes, patterns, and insights related to the impact of globalization on Arabic. According to Neuendorf (2017), content analysis is an effective method for analyzing textual data, enabling researchers to understand deeper meanings and contextual relationships within literature.

The analytical framework integrates linguistic, sociocultural, and technological perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the shifting dynamics surrounding the Arabic language. This method allows for a nuanced interpretation of how Arabic continues to function as both a sacred and cultural symbol amid increasing global pressures.

Result

The Position of Arabic as a Religious Identity

Arabic has a unique position in the world due to its status as a holy language in Islam. As the language of the Qur'an, Arabic plays an important role in shaping the religious identity of Muslims around the world. Research shows that the ability to read and understand Arabic is often associated with a person's level of religiosity. This is acknowledged by Suleiman (2003) in *The Arabic Language and National Identity*, which states that Arabic is not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of a strong religious and cultural identity.

The Social Identity Theory of Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1986) can be applied here to explain how Arabic functions as a group identity. In this theory, a person's identity is linked to a certain social group, and language becomes an important symbol of connection between the individual and that group. Arabic, as the language of religion, binds Muslims in a collective identity that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. In this context, the ability to speak Arabic is often considered a measure of religious piety, given its relevance to daily worship, such as prayer, reading the Qur'an, and other religious activities.

Arabic in Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar, and others, can be distinguished into two languages, namely: Fuscha Arabic and Ammiyah Arabic. These two languages are used in different contexts and nuances.

Arabic fuscha, is usually used in official forums such as state, scientific, academic, journalistic events, and also includes sermons. Ubaid Ridlo (2010) Meanwhile, the Ammiyah language is used in unofficial, interpersonal communication, and in social interactions in various places such as homes, offices, airports, and other places.

The lack of concern of the Arabs in the use of the Arabic fuscha language in the official forum held, this condition makes the Arabic language even more marginalized in the era of globalization. And this led to the greatest setback for the Arab nation and culture. In addition, there are other efforts that want to be implemented and disseminated among the Arab community, namely popularizing the use of colonial Arabic (local dialect) and ruling out the use of fuscha Arabic.

However, in the era of globalization, there are major challenges that arise due to the dominance of English in science, technology, and global communication. David Crystal (2003) in his book *English as a Global Language* shows how English has become an international language that dominates almost all fields, from technology to academia. This has led to Arabic, although still highly respected in religious contexts, being used less in non-religious fields, especially among the younger generation.

Challenges of Arabic Language in the Era of Globalization

Some of the main challenges that the Arabic language faces in maintaining its religious identity include:

1. **Language Hybridization.**

Arabic is experiencing hybridization with other languages, especially in everyday conversation. This phenomenon is known as code-switching or language mixing, in which elements of English or French are often incorporated into the structure of the Arabic language. Blom & Gumperz (1972) studied code-switching in Norway and provided basic research on its sociolinguistic function. They categorize code-switching as situational (when language choices change according to settings, such as formal vs informal situations) or metaphorical (when language switching reflects a change in topic, emotion, or perspective). This theory emphasizes that code-switching serves as a tool for social and cultural tagging.

2. **Language Shift in Education and Media**

In the education sector, many institutions in Arab countries are beginning to adopt English as the language of instruction, especially in science and technology. This makes Arabic sometimes seen as less relevant in higher education. Mazrui (2004) in the book *Cultural Forces in World Politics* notes that the influence of English in education in Arab countries is often associated with efforts to follow international standards, especially in the field of science and technology. However, he also reminded that this could have an impact on the weakening of local cultural identity.

3. **Economic Pressure and Cultural Globalization.**

Globalization not only has an impact on the economy and technology, but also on cultural consumption patterns. In many ways, English is becoming a more lucrative language in the world of work and industry. Graddol (2006) in *English Next* explains that the knowledge-based economy makes English a basic need, especially in the global creative, technology, and communication industry sectors. English is considered the main tool to compete in the global market.

Efforts to Preserve the Arabic Language

Despite the many challenges, there are various efforts being made to preserve the Arabic language as a symbol of religious identity:

1. **Strengthening Arabic Language in Education.**

Many Arab countries are now strengthening Arabic language education, especially in religious subjects. This effort aims to increase awareness of the importance of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an. Hassan (2009) in his book *Language and Identity in the Arab World* highlights that Arabic is not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of religious and cultural identity.

Strengthening Arabic language education, especially in the context of religious learning, aims to maintain Islamic values contained in the Qur'an.

2. Digitization of the Arabic Language.

The use of technology, such as Arabic learning apps and the digitization of religious books, has helped to expand the reach of the Arabic language to a global audience. Platforms such as Quran.com or the Duolingo Arabic app have contributed significantly in introducing Arabic to non-native speakers.

3. Cultural Awareness-raising.

Programs spearheaded by organizations such as the Arab League by promoting World Arabic Language Day on December 18 help raise international awareness of the importance of the Arabic language as a symbol of religious and cultural identity. In this context, the theory of Language Revitalization explained by Fishman (1991) in *Reversing Language Shift* provides insight that to preserve language, efforts are needed that involve all aspects of society, ranging from education, media, to government policies.

Discussion

Relevance and Sustainability of Arabic

Arabic is in a unique position in the modern world. On the one hand, it has a very strong symbolic and sacred value as the language of the Qur'an and a tool of worship. However, on the other hand, it has to compete with global languages, especially English, which dominate almost all aspects of modern life, from economics to technology. Blommaert (2010) in *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* argues that local languages often struggle to maintain their relevance in the midst of globalization. The Arabic language faces great challenges, but it also has the potential to survive with an approach that involves digitization, education, and policies that support the preservation of this language.

According to Heller (2007) in *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*, the preservation of the Arabic language in today's global world requires a multidimensional approach, which not only involves Arab countries, but also the international community. Strengthening the role of the Arabic language as part of the global identity of Muslims is very important, not only to preserve the language itself, but also to maintain the sustainability of the religious values contained in the language.

Thus, the preservation of the Arabic language is not only the duty of Arab countries, but it is the shared responsibility of Muslims around the world to keep this language relevant and serve as a symbol of a strong religious identity.

This research has novelty in several aspects:

1. Context of Globalization.

This study examines Arabic as a symbol of religious identity in the context of globalization, taking into account the dominance of English and the influence of technology and social media on the Arabic language.

2. Comparison between the Younger Generation and the Older Generation.

This study can compare the views of the younger generation who are more exposed to foreign languages (especially English) with the older generation who still retain Arabic as a language of worship and culture.

3. Preservation Through Technology.

Another novelty is the emphasis on efforts to preserve the Arabic language through digital technology, such as Arabic language learning applications and digital Qur'an platforms, which have not been studied in depth in the context of globalization.

Conclusion

Arabic, as a primary symbol of Islamic religious identity, faces multifaceted challenges in the era of globalization. The dominance of English in science and technology, the shift from *fus-ha* to *'amiyah*, and the lack of robust technological support for Arabic have collectively diminished its role in modern life. This study reveals that globalization not only threatens the prominence of Arabic but also presents strategic opportunities for its revitalization through digital integration, educational reform, and cultural promotion. The rise of Arabic-language digital media, language learning applications, and global initiatives such as World Arabic Language Day serve as vital tools for preserving the language's relevance.

Therefore, the preservation of Arabic requires collective efforts involving educational institutions, governments, the global Muslim community, and the technology sector. Arabic is not merely a language of worship, but a vital medium for upholding Islamic values and cultural heritage amid global transformations. A multidimensional and cross-sectoral approach is essential to ensure that Arabic remains vibrant, relevant, and embraced by future generations. Further research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of the digital learning program for Arabic language in non-Arab communities.

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