

THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC LITERATURE: The Role of Arabic-Islamic Literary Tradition in Shaping Indonesian Spiritual and Cultural Thought

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Abstract: Arabic–Islamic literary traditions have played a significant role in shaping the development of Indonesian Islamic literature, influencing its themes, forms, language, and intellectual orientation. Although the Islamization of the Indonesian archipelago has received considerable scholarly attention, the literary dimensions of cultural transmission between Arabic and Indonesian texts remain insufficiently examined. This study explores how Arabic–Islamic literary traditions contributed to the formation and transformation of Indonesian Islamic literature from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century. Using a qualitative research design that integrates historical and intertextual approaches, the study analyzes selected classical and modern Indonesian literary works alongside representative Arabic–Islamic texts. The analysis focuses on three interrelated dimensions: thematic influence, linguistic and stylistic adaptation, and the transmission of Islamic ethical and spiritual values. The findings demonstrate that Arabic–Islamic literary influence extends beyond the borrowing of vocabulary or narrative motifs. Rather, it constitutes a continuous process of cultural translation and intellectual exchange through which Indonesian authors appropriated, reinterpreted, and localized Arabic literary models. This process is evident in the persistence of religious and Sufi themes, the adaptation of Arabic rhetorical and narrative conventions, and the internalization of *adab* as a moral and aesthetic framework. The study argues that Indonesian Islamic literature emerged through sustained transregional literary interactions that connected local literary creativity with broader Islamic intellectual networks, contributing to the formation of a unique literary tradition in the Malay-Indonesian world.

Keywords: Arabic–Islamic literary tradition, Indonesian Islamic literature, cultural transmission, intertextuality, *adab*, Islamization.

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| Corresponding author | Halimi |
| Article history | Submitted: August 11, 2025 Revision: February 19, 2026 Accepted: June 12, 2026 Published: June 17, 2026 |
| How to cite this article | Halimi, Muassomah and Achmad Yani. "THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC LITERATURE: The Role of Arabic-Islamic Literary Tradition in Shaping Indonesian Spiritual and Cultural Thought." <i>MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman</i> 50, no. 1 (2026): 374-396. http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v50i1.1571 |

Introduction

In a global context, cross-cultural literary transmission represents a social phenomenon that reflects the dynamic exchange of knowledge, religion, and cultural identity among societies. In fact, since the medieval period, Arabic-Islamic literature has played a pivotal role in influencing the intellectual discourse of Islamic societies through religious text, adab literature, narrative hikayat, and Sufi writings. In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, the process of Islamization cannot be separated from the introduction of Arabic-Islamic literacy traditions, which subsequently interacted with local cultures. Manuscripts, hikayat, syair, and even modern Indonesian literature demonstrate strong traces of Arabic–Islamic intertextuality. Nevertheless, the complexity of the transmission of Arabic-Islamic literature has not been fully understood as a long-term historical process from the fourteenth century to the twenty-first century, thus emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive study that considers a cross-period and cross-textual approach.

Language is a characteristic of humans that distinguishes them from other living things.¹ It is strengthened by Fromkin and Bomann, who say that language is the source of human life and power,² in line with that,³ say that spoken language as the primary form of communication that affects how a person records past events and interprets them in the future. Therefore language is often interpreted as necessary for forming group identity.⁴ Hence, in Islam, linguistic competence is inherently tied to spiritual literacy—the ability to understand, recite, and internalize divine messages through the Arabic language. In Islamic civilization, language is not only a communicative tool but a sacred medium. Arabic, as the language of the Qur’ân, carries divine revelation (*wahy*), moral symbolism, and epistemological authority that shape Islamic thought and literature.⁵ The use of Arabic thus transcends linguistics—it embodies the transmission of faith, culture, and ethics. In line with that, language is also used in writing scriptures, which serve as guidelines for religious life. For example, Arabic is used in the holy book of Islam.⁶ So effective Arabic instruction will minimize errors when reading the Holy Qur’ân.⁷ In line with this,⁸ said that religion is a belief system in which there is a community that was not known before the seventeenth century; besides that, the concept of religion is something generic.

Harmonizes language, religion, and ethnicity into three categories regarding language and religion.⁹ First, language and religion are domains of cultural practice that have two sides; on the one hand, language and religion are a tool to unite, while language and religion are a tool to divide the nation.¹⁰ Points out, Indonesian is the language that unites the diversity of the existing regional languages.¹¹ While in religion, conflicts still color it. Second, language and religion are primary forms of social, cultural, and political identification, where language and religion function as markers, symbols, or symbols. Third, the family is the central place to socialize language, and religion. The

result is that religion tends to replace language as contestation over the political accommodation of cultural differences and reverses what is striking from the historical process, where language has previously replaced religion as the main focus in disputes.¹²

Arabic is the 'language of the Qur'ân' and other Islamic sources, such as the Prophet's *hadîts*, which Muslims consider sacred.¹³ Arabic is also an autograph of the alphabet, morphologically similar to Hebrew Ibrani.¹⁴ Arabic morphology is classified as complicated because it has radical words, prefixes, suffixes, and the meaning of Arabic sentences depending on the position of the *kalimatnya*.¹⁵ The introduction of Arabic to the Indonesian archipelago was inseparable from the Islamization process, where traders, scholars (*'ulamâ'*), and Sufi missionaries brought not only religion but also the Arabic literary tradition. Arabic became a vehicle of *da'wah*, intellectual exchange, and cultural refinement (*adab*).¹⁶ The presence of Arabic is inseparable from the process of entering Islam into Indonesia. In Ricklefs' trilogy on the history of Java, the entry of Islam into Southeast Asia is a process that cannot be separated from beliefs, ideologies, and practices inherited locally.¹⁷ Islam Nusantara combines the universal understanding of Islam and cultural elements as a characteristic feature of Indonesia, namely tolerance, peace, and moderation.¹⁸ This synthesis gave birth to a distinctive Islamic-Malay literary culture where Arabic expressions, poetic forms (*qasîdah, ghazal*), and spiritual metaphors were indigenized into Malay works such as *Hikayat Nabi Bercukur* and *Syair Perahu*.¹⁹

Arabic in Indonesia has an exceptional development that is different from other languages and literature because of the position of Arabic in Indonesia as the language of Islam and the cultural carrier language.²⁰ There are three types of influence of Arabic on Indonesian, namely the influence of vocabulary, the influence of Arabic script, and the influence of syntax. The magnitude of the influence of the Arabic language can be seen in the loan words from Arabic, which ranks third after Dutch and English. In addition, the use of Arabic script is still widely found in books, both Islamic religious books, Arabic books, sagas, and literature written in Malay Arabic script. In this case, the beauty of Arabic is also recognized by Hidayat.²¹ As a high-quality literary value for those studying it. Arabic is also destined as the language of the Qur'ân that communicates the word of God in which there is a fantastic language uslub for humans, and no one can match it.²²

In recent developments, studies on the relationship between Arabic and Indonesian literature have tended to evolve along three principal trajectories. First, philological-codicological studies continue to emphasize textual transmission and scholarly networks, however they often remain confined to historical description without adequately elaborating the transformation of meanings across different periods.²³ Second, contemporary thematic-ideological approaches highlight the internalization of Islamic values (such as Sufism, prophetic ethics, and Islamic symbolism), yet they tend to frame this process merely as local adaptation, without systematically tracing its intertextual dimensions.²⁴ Third, linguistic studies focus on lexical borrowings and Arabic rhetorical

styles, but these are generally fragmented and insufficiently connected to thematic or ideological aspects.²⁵ Furthermore, an epistemological tension persists within the literature: some studies conceptualize Arab influence as a linear and dominant process of transmission, while others emphasize local agency and cultural negotiation within Indonesian literary traditions. Nevertheless, these two perspectives have not yet been fully reconciled within a comprehensive analytical framework capable of explaining how such influences operate simultaneously across thematic, formal/linguistic, and ideological dimensions, as well as how these processes unfold across different historical periods, from classical to modern literature.

Based on the mapping and critical evaluation of the existing literature, the research gap may be articulated more precisely as the absence of an intertextual analytical model that integratively connects thematic, linguistic, and ideological dimensions within a coherent analytical framework, as well as the lack of a diachronic perspective capable of systematically bridging continuity and transformation between the classical Islamic literary tradition of the Nusantara and modern Indonesian literature. Within this context, the present study positions itself to address this gap through the application of a comprehensive intertextual approach that not only traces the trajectories of influence, but also elaborates the mechanisms through which meaning is transformed and reproduced across a long historical span. Therefore, this study proposes a comprehensive intertextual approach to address three principal research questions: (1) how Arabic literature has influenced the thematic repertoire of Indonesian literature; (2) how Arabic literature has shaped the formal and linguistic expressions of Indonesian literary works; and (3) which Arabic elements are embedded in the messages and content of Indonesian literary texts. This approach is expected to contribute to and enrich existing scholarship on Islamic literature in Indonesia.

This study is grounded in the argument that Indonesian Islamic literature did not develop autonomously, but rather through an ongoing process of intertextual dialogue with the Arabic-Islamic literary tradition. This transmission is not a form of passive imitation; instead, it entails processes of adaptation, localization, and reinterpretation shaped by Indonesia's socio-cultural context. The present study is positioned at the intersection of the debate mentioned above. It argues that both continuity and contestation may occur simultaneously, depending on the period, genre, and the ways in which local authors engage with and reinterpret Arabic sources. Thus, Arabic influence is evident not only in vocabulary and religious symbolism but also in narrative structures, rhetorical patterns, and the construction of literary meaning. The main argument of this study asserts that a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesian literature, both classical and modern, can be achieved by situating it within a historical, dynamic, and creative network of Arabic-Islamic literary transmission.

Method

This research employs qualitative library research using purposive textual sampling. The corpus was selected on the basis of the following three criteria (period, influence, and representativeness). First, period: it covers two major eras—(a) the classical period (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries), which represents the early phase of Arab-Islamic literary interaction in the Nusantara, and (b) the modern period (twentieth to twenty-first centuries), which reflects the development of contemporary Indonesian Islamic literature. Second, influence: the texts were selected because they reflect Arab-Islamic intertextual influences at the levels of theme, form, and diction. Third, representativeness: the texts were chosen because they have been recognized in academic literature as canonical or representative works within the tradition of Indonesian Islamic literature, as noted in previous studies Azra, Braginsky and Kaptein. The primary data are literary texts that represent key moments of Indonesian Islamic literature: (1) classical Malay-Islamic/Sufi works associated with Aceh (e. g., Hamzah Fansuri and related writers), and (2) selected modern and contemporary Indonesian Islamic poems and prose that explicitly engage religious themes or Arabic-Islamic registers (e. g., devotional poetry, Islamic moral narratives, pesantren-based writing). Secondary data include peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and reference works on Arabic literature, Malay-Indonesian literary history, and Islamization in the archipelago.

Data collection proceeded in three steps: (a) compiling a corpus based on relevance to Arabic-Islamic influence (themes, forms, or diction), (b) extracting textual units (lines, stanzas, passages) that contain Arabic lexical items, recognizable genre conventions, or Qur'anic/Sufi motifs, and (c) documenting the scholarly context for each text (periodization, authorial background, and prior interpretations).

Data analysis was conducted through a systematic coding procedure consisting of three stages. First stage, open coding, all extracted textual units were assigned initial codes based on the occurrence of Arab-Islamic elements (such as Arabic loanwords, Arabic phrases, Sufistic themes, hikayat genre conventions, and rhyme patterns). Second stage, axial coding, these initial codes were grouped into three predefined major analytical categories: (a) thematic repertoire, (b) formal/genre adaptation, and (c) linguistic-rhetorical features. Third stage, selective coding, patterns of relationship among these categories were identified, for instance, whether particular themes tended appear alongside with certain generic forms, or whether specific periods represent the predominance of particular categories. In addition. Data analysis used content analysis supported by an intertextual and historical-cultural transmission framework. Textual units were coded into three analytic categories: thematic repertoire (e.g., *tauḥîd*, eschatology, divine love, asceticism), formal/genre adaptation (*syair/nazam*, *hikayat*, devotional forms), and linguistic-rhetorical features (loanwords, Arabic phrases, rhyme and cadence).

The findings were validated through two methods. First, source triangulation: the results of the analysis of a text were compared with findings from previous studies on the same or similar texts in order to ensure interpretive consistency. Second, textual comparison, in which findings concerning Arabic elements in Indonesian texts were directly compared with the Arabic source texts (or their translations) to verify that the claimed influence originated from the Arab-Islamic tradition rather than from other sources. Findings were validated through comparison with previous studies and triangulation across multiple sources. This procedure enables a transparent mapping of what is transmitted, how it is transformed, and where the novelty of the argument lies.

Results and Discussion

Results

The influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literary themes

The influence of Arabic literature arises from something that forms something else.²⁶ There is something caused by Arabic literature in various forms in Indonesian literature. Arabic literary traditions, especially Islamic and Sufi themes, have been deeply embedded in Indonesian literary works, shaping both poetic structures and spiritual narratives. The influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literature includes the themes of poetry. The themes presented by Indonesian writers have similarities with the themes in Arabic literature, both from the old generation of poets, the old Malay literary generation, the new poet generation, and the generation of poets after it. The themes revolve around divinity (*ilâhiyah*), physical, social (*ijtimâ'iyah*), and egoism (*anâniyah*). Also, on the themes of *zuhd*, wisdom, prayer, praise (*al-madah*), love (*al-ghazal*), lamentation (*al-hija'*), and ridicule (*al-ritsa*).

Table 1. Similarities in literary themes

| No | Poetry | | Coding |
|----|--|---|------------------------------------|
| | Indonesian | English | |
| 1 | <p><i>Inilah gerangan suatu madah mengarangkan syair terlalu indah membetuli jalan tempat berpindah disanalah iktikat diperbetuli sudah</i></p> <p><i>wahai muda kenali dirimu lalah perahu tamsil hidupmu tiadalah berapa lama hidupmu</i></p> <p><i>keakhirat jua kekal hidupmu (Hamzah fansuri)</i></p> | <p>This is a hymn writing poetry is too beautiful fixing the way to move that's where the knot has been corrected</p> <p>O young, know yourself be the boat of your life It doesn't matter how long your life is the hereafter is your eternal life</p> | <p>About the afterlife</p> |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 2 | <p><i>Ada sajadah panjang terbentang Dari kaki buaian Sampai ke tepi kuburan hamba</i></p> <p><i>Kuburan hamba bila mati Ada sajadah panjang terbentang Hamba tunduk dan sujud Di atas sajadah yang panjang ini Diselingi sekedar interupsi</i></p> <p><i>Mencari rezeki, mencari ilmu</i></p> <p><i>Mengukur jalanan seharian Begitu terdengar suara azan</i></p> <p><i>Kembali tersungkur hamba Ada sajadah panjang terbentang Hamba tunduk dan rukuk Hamba sujud dan tak lepas kening hamba</i></p> <p><i>Mengingat Dikau Sepenuhnya (Sajadah Panjang -Taufik Ismail)</i></p> | <p>There is a long prayer rug From the foot of the cradle To the edge of the servant's grave Servant's grave when he dies There is a long prayer rug I bow and prostrate On top of this long prayer Interspersed with mere interruptions Looking for sustenance, seeking knowledge Measuring the streets all day As soon as the call to prayer is heard Back down servant There is a long prayer rug Servant submits and bows I prostrate and don't let go of my forehead Remember You Completely</p> | <p>About Divinity</p> |
| 3 | <p><i>Kasihkan hidup sebab dikau segala kuntum mengoyak kepak membunga cinta dalam hatiku mewangi sari dalam jantungku (Amir Hamzah)</i></p> | <p>Love life because of you all the buds tear the flaps flower love in my heart scent the essence in my heart</p> | <p>Sufi themes of living only for god</p> |

Before the presence of Arabic literature in Indonesia, the themes of the afterlife, divinity, and Sufism were not present in Indonesian literature. Just as classical Malay literature is not found in Arabic-Malay script (*pegon*), and it is not known with certainty the letters used in Malay.²⁷ This proves that the influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literary themes is very significant. Although the theme of divinity is universal, the themes of divinity, the afterlife, and Sufi are different from themes in other literature, especially poetry that has similarities with Arab poets such as Rumi, al-Hallaj, and Sana'i. Poems and saga with the theme of Sufism can be found in the writings of Hamzah Fansûrî, Bukhari al-Jauhari, Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, Nûruddîn al-Rânîrî, and 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkilî. Such as *Boat Poems*, *Pungguk Poems*, *Trade Poems*, *Pingai Bird Poems*, *Faqir Assembly Poems*, and *Tongkol Fish Poem*.²⁸

In Indonesian poetry, many Sufi themes are closely related to the Sufism they adhere to, such as the divine love poem, *syi'r al-hubb al-ilâhî*, verses for the

purification of God (*syi'r al-tasbîh*), poetic ascetism (*al-zuhd*), poems asking God (*syi'r al-du'â*), poetry of wisdom and morals (*syi'r al-hikmah wa al-adab*), the poetry of praise to the Prophet (*al-maddâ'ih al-nabawiyyah*). The themes in Indonesian correspond to the themes in Arabic literature: *al-madh* (praise), *al-ghazal* (women, love), *al-hijâ* (anger, hatred), *al-fakhr* (pride), *al-madh* (praise, good character, commendable value), *al-ritsâ'* (sadness, pain, despair), *al-zuhd* (*zuhud*), *al-i'tidzâr* (forgiveness, apology), *al-washf* (state of nature).²⁹

In the poetry of Hamzah Fansuri (seventeenth century) and the poetry of Taufik Ismail (twentieth century) in Table 1, it can be seen that the transformation occurs at the level of the way the theme of divinity is expressed. Hamzah Fansuri expresses the theme of the afterlife explicitly and doctrinally (“*keakhirat jua kekal hidupmu*”), while Taufik Ismail expresses the same theme implicitly through everyday symbols (“*sajadah panjang terbentang dari kaki buaian sampai ke tepi kuburan*”). This transformation occurs due to changes in sociocultural context: from the highly religious and doctrinal era of the *kesultanan Aceh* to the more diverse and secular era of Indonesia, so that modern poets have to “hide” religious messages in everyday symbols in order to remain relevant.

The Influence of Arabic Literature on the Form of Language in Indonesian Literature

The influence of Arabic literature in the aspect of language form appears in the vocabulary used and appears in various Indonesian literary terms derived from Arabic literature. In some terms in Indonesian literature, terminology appears which is taken from Arabic literature, such as poetry, *madah*, *barzanji*, *rubaiyat*, poet, *qasîdah*, *hikayat*. The following examples of poetry are widespread in old Indonesian literature.

Table 2. Influence on the aspect of form

| | Poetry | Coding |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Indonesian | English | |
| <i>Sekali menjadi thalib</i> | Once become a student | <i>Rubaiyat</i> |
| <i>Sekali mejadi ghaib</i> | Once become unseen | |
| <i>Sekali menjadi ta'ib</i> | Once a penitent | |
| <i>Di dalam dunia terlalu ghalib</i> | In a world all too ordinary | |

In the long piece of poetry above, several words use Arabic, such as *thâlib* (طالب), *ghâ'ib* (غائب), *tâ'ib* (تائب), and *ghâlib* (غالب). It is as if the poet is introducing new words in each stanza. In the 32 strands of Hamzah Fansuri's poetry alone, there are approximately 700 words derived from Arabic, and from other old poets, there is also vocabulary from Arabic. This shows a significant influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literature.

Table 3. Use in the form of chasidah

| Poetry | | Coding |
|---|---|--|
| Indonesian | English | |
| <i>Riya' dan khayâl ilmu nafsâni</i> | Ostentation and imaginary the science of psychology | Resembles the form of Arabic poetry (<i>qasîdah</i>) |
| <i>Di manakah sampai pada ilmu yang 'ali</i> | Where did you arrive at the knowledge | |
| <i>Seperti Bayazid dan Mansur Baghdadi</i> | Like Bayazid and Mansur Baghdadi | |
| <i>Mengatakan Ana al-Haqq dan qawl Subhân</i> | Claiming that I Am the All-True and the All-Holy | |

In the poem above, for each stanza of poetry, the vocabulary used is Arabic vocabulary, such as *riyâ'* (رياء), *khayâl* (خيال), *nafsânî* (نفساني), *'ilm* (علم), *'Alî* (علي), *anâ* (أنا), *al-haqq* (الحق), *qawl* (قول), *subhân* (سبحان). There are also Indonesian poems written in Arabic characters.

Table 4. Indonesian poetry written in pegon (Arabic letters)

| Poetry | | Coding |
|--|--|--|
| Indonesian | English | |
| # أهلا هاما نيداء (<i>Aduh gusti hamba bukan ahli surga # Tetapi tidak kuat siksa neraka</i>) | God, we are not dwellers of heaven# but we are not strong against the torments of hell | Indonesian written with Arabic letters |
| # فوجيان ارتيجا توهان (<i>Alhamdulillah artinya pujian # Sedangkan kata Rabb artinya Tuhan</i>) | Alhamdulillah means praise # while the word Rabb means God | |

Moreover, in Indonesian literature, the vocabulary is mainly Arabic, either poetry or prose; saga, stories, sermons, and treatises. In the sermons read by a lecturer, not a few use Arabic vocabulary, such as the narration that was read during the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday.

Tables 2 and 3 show the transformation from the rubaiyat form to the *qasîdah* form. In Table 2 (*rubâ'iyat*), Arabic vocabulary is limited to four words (*thâlib*, *ghâ'ib*, *tâ'ib*, *ghâlib*) with a semantic function as spiritual terms. In Table 3 (*qasîdah*), Arabic vocabulary is more numerous and more grammatically complex, even including full phrases such as "*Ana al-Haqq*," which is a direct quotation from al-Hallaj. This transformation occurs due to differences in the social function of the texts: rubaiyat is more meditative-personal, while *qasîdah* is declarative-public and is often used in the context of *da'wah* or teaching in pesantren.

Arabic Literature in Variations in the Use of Indonesian Literary Language

The influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literature in the aspect of variations in language use is evident in the poetry of the type of poetry and prose. It also appears in Malay literature in the form of *wazn* (*matra*), *qâfiyah* (rhyme), and fragments of stanzas (*darb*). Flow in the form of poetry also occurs in poetry, as in Arabic poetry in the form of Arabic prosody (*‘arûdh* science), as well as *qâfiyah*, *baḥar* and *wazn* as practiced by Hamzah Fansûrî, Syamsuddîn al-Pasâ’î, Nûruddîn al-Rânîrî, and ‘Abd al-Ra’ûf al-Singkilî. The following example illustrates the influence of Arabic literature on these language variations.

Table 5 The variety of forms is the same as the science of Arabic poetry, or the Science of *‘Arûdh*.

| Indonesian | Poetry | Coding |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| | English | |
| <i>Ilmu jawhar sungguhpun qabil</i> | The knowledge of the essence is, indeed, acceptable | Using the same rhyme (like <i>qâfiyah</i> in Arabic) |
| <i>Akan kuat badan hanya hasil</i> | Will be strong only the result | |
| <i>Pada ilmu Allah kerjanya ha’il</i> | In the knowledge of Allah, His work is awe-inspiring | |
| <i>Antara Allah dan orang kamil</i> | Between Allah and the perfected man | |

Malays have also abandoned the forms of hikayat, syair, gazal, rubai, masnawi, and barzanzi in the old Indonesian literature.³⁰

Poets still used the traditional Arabic poetry form since pre-Islamic times. This form is the form introduced by al-Khalîl al-Farîhidîy, one of the pioneers of Arabic linguists, who created the science of poetry patterns called *‘ard* and *Qâfiyah* science. There are 16 patterns of poetry in the science of *‘arudh* called *baḥr*, namely four patterns of eight meters, eight patterns of six meters, and four patterns of four meters.

Tables 5 and 6 show the transformation in the *qâfiyah* (rhyme) pattern. In Table 5, the rhyme is uniform (*qâbil - ḥâshil - ḥâ’il - kâmil*), reflecting the classical Arabic rhyme pattern (AAAA). In Table 6, the rhyme is also uniform (*Khâliq - ‘Âsyiq - nâthiq - shâdiq*), but with a higher level of phonetic complexity due to the use of the Arabic uvular consonant (/q/). This transformation occurs because Hamzah Fansuri does not merely imitate Arabic patterns, but adapts them to the phonotactics of the Malay language—eliminating Arabic sounds that have no equivalents in Malay, while maintaining the basic rhythmic structure. This is evidence of creative adaptation, not passive imitation.

What appears most prominently in Hamzah Fansuri's poetry is the rhythm alone or, in Indonesian, as a rhyme. From the beginning to the end of the poem, he uses this rhythm uninterrupted. In the science of Balaghah it is explained what is meant by 'ardh is the adjustment of the final letter in *qâfiyah*, an example from the verse of the Qur'ân.

In prose, it is clear that the tradition of writing Arabic literature heavily influenced the writing of classical Malay literature. Even for historical literature, the title and the language are heavily influenced by Arabic terms, such as Kitab *Tuhfat al-Nafis and Sulâlat al-Salâthin*. Every historical literary writing usually begins with an opening (*muqaddimah*), praise (*hamdalah*), blessings, and greetings. Arabic and Persian terms are considered to have been understood by the reader, such as shahdan, the Prophets, and others. Or include Qur'anic verses that are commonly used in Islamic writing, such as *wa-Allâhu a'lam bi al-shawâb*, or *wa-ilaihi marji'un wa al-ma'âb*.³¹

Indonesia was once flooded with Arabic prose translations. Such as the works of al-Manfaluthi, Najib Mahfudz, Taufiq Hakim, Nawal as-Sa'dawi, Mahmud Taimur, Jibran Khalil Jibran, and Najib al-Kailani, and this influenced Indonesian writers, and later similar prose appeared. Arabic prose in the form of: novelettes (*uqshûshiyyah*), short stories (*qishshah qashîrah*), novels (*qishshah*) and romances (*riwâyah*), and dramas (*masrahiyyah*).

Influence can be found in religious messages, such as carrying out religious orders, staying away from prohibitions, having good faith, obeying Allah, not being greedy, remembering the afterlife, being devoted to both parents, being fair, being obedient, fearing Allah.

Table 6. the same use of *wazan, badi', qafiyah* as Arabic poetry

| | Poetry | | Coding |
|--|---|--|--------|
| | Indonesian | English | |
| <i>Syurbat mulia dari tangan Khaliq</i> | Noble <i>Syurbat</i> from <i>Khâliq's</i> | Using the same rhyme (like <i>qâfiyah</i> in Arabic) | |
| <i>Akan minuman sekalian Asyiq</i> | About the fun drink | | |
| <i>Barang meminum dia menjadi natiq</i> | Whoever drinks of it becomes articulate | | |
| <i>Mengatakan al-Haqq dia terlalu shadiq</i> | in proclaiming the Truth (<i>al-Haqq</i>), he is most sincere | | |

Before Malay became Indonesia, they had accepted and adopted Islamic culture, which was inseparable from Arab culture. In general, the influence of Islam on Malay literature can be explained by poetry or syair as a branch of Malay literature that originates from the Arabic literary tradition.³² It also suggests that mystical literature introduced Arabic and Persian poetry to the archipelago. Since Aceh in the XIV century had begun to become the center of Islamic studies in the archipelago, it had become a pathway for developing Islamic influence in Indonesian poetry. Then in the next century, poetry developed widely and became a branch, and the most essential Malay literatures were: *ghazal, matsnawi (madah), nazham, kith'ah* and *ruba'i*.³³

According to Ramadan and Pantu, literary works of the Prose type are classified into six groups, namely: a) stories about the prophets, b) stories about the Prophet Muhammad and his family, c) stories about Islamic heroes, d) stories about Islamic teachings and beliefs, e) fiction stories, f) mystical and mystical stories. The Malay literature was primarily the result of Muslim writers, who were influenced by Arabic literature. Likewise, a lot of written literature that was thought to have been written during the Hindu era turned out to be present and written during the Islamic period. There is also a book of literature that references Islam's religion for the Malay community because, at that time, not many Malays understood Arabic.

Treatises or messages about Islam, the story of the Prophet Muhammad, and the main points of Islamic teachings are subjects that Islamic poets have written in the archipelago. However, the most visible of these stories is the story of the Prophet, about his noble character, and events that have to do with his apostolate. Among the stories about the Prophet Muhammad is the Story of Nur Muhammad, the Story of the Prophet's Miracles, the Story of Shaving, the Story of the Prophet Mi'raj, the Story of Allah's Apostle, and The Story of the Prophet's Death.³⁴ All of the saga results from adaptations of local writers from Arabic and Persian stories. In Malay literature, there are also types of fictitious stories that readers enjoy, namely witty stories such as the story of Abu Nawas (a famous poet in the Abbasid era) or the saga of Umar Ummayyah (Umar Moyo), which has been adapted from an Arabic work.³⁵ According to Hadi, Islamic literature in Indonesia cannot be separated from the development of Malay literature. He further stated that the development of Islamic Malay literature from the beginning of its emergence to the end of its classical era could be classified into four periods, namely (1) the Early Period (14th-15th centuries AD); (2) Transitional Period (late 15th century to mid-century AD). 16th century CE); (3) Classical Period (late 16th century to early 18th century CE); (4) Late Period (mid-18th century to early 20th century CE).³⁶

Discussion

The findings of this study present a synthesis in the form of three main propositions. First, Arab-Islamic influence on Indonesian literature is selective and adaptive, not all Arabic genres are adopted, but only those that are suited to the needs of *da'wah* and the formation of the Islamic identity of the Nusantara. Second, transformation occurs through a mechanism of symbol localization, Arab metaphors such as "*cinta ilahi*" are translated into maritime metaphors such as "*perahu*" (Hamzah Fansuri) or domestic metaphors such as "*sajadah*" (Taufik Ismail). Third, there is a transformation in function from the classical era to the modern era, in the classical era, Arabic elements function as epistemic authority (markers of religious truth); whereas in the modern era, Arabic elements transformation into markers of identity and a strategy of moral authorization in the midst of a more secular public.

In the constellation of world arenas, Indonesia is better known as the recipient of influence, not as an agent who exerts influence. In Indonesian world literature, it is a kind of potpourri from all kinds of influences from world literature.³⁷ This will be the focus of the discussion on Arabic literature in the influence of literature in Indonesia. According to Nurhadi, Arabic literature comprises only one book title in the last decade, which according to the author, is not a literary work. During the first seven years of the 21st century, there were at least 22 foreign literature review articles out of around 364 book review articles that were related to literature and various other issues that appeared every week. Its appearance is also uneven. During 2001 there were only two articles on foreign literature reviews, in 2002 there were none, in 2003 there were two articles, in 2004 there were six articles, then in 2005 there were nine articles, and in 2006 there were three articles.³⁸

These findings can be synthesized to suggest that the influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literature is not linear, but rather wave-like. The first wave (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries) was marked by strong influence through the networks of *ulama* and *kesultanan*, characterized by the adoption of Arabic poetic genres (*syair*, *rubai*, *qasidah*) and Sufistic themes. The second wave (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries) saw this influence weaken due to colonialism, but it remained present in *pesantren* traditions and in the literature of *Pegon* texts. The third wave (twentieth to twenty-first centuries) saw this influence re-emerge in a new form —as a strategy of moral authorization in popular Islamic fiction (Habiburrahman El Shirazy, etc.) and as a form of resistance to the hegemony of Western secular literature. This wave-like pattern shows that Arabic influence never truly disappeared, it only changed the arena of its manifestation.

The influence of Arabic literature is evident in the themes used in Indonesian literature, the vocabulary (language aspect) used in Indonesian literature, and religious messages in Indonesian literature which are also influenced by Arabic literature. Not only are messages heavily influenced by Arabic literature, but Indonesian poetry forms are also heavily influenced, such as stanzas, lines, word count, *mitrum*, and rhyming poetry. The intensive influence of Arabic literature causes Indonesian literature to be rich in religious meanings.

Beyond listing borrowings, the transmission of Arabic-Islamic literature can be read as a process of cultural translation: Nusantara authors and scholarly networks selected, domesticated, and re-signified Arabic genres and motifs to answer local needs of piety, authority, and communal identity. This means that “influence” is not a one-way import, but a negotiated practice shaped by itinerant *ulama* networks, manuscript circulation, and *pesantren* pedagogy.³⁹

By comparing three periods (classical Aceh, late colonial, and national-modern), it can be understood that the transformation of Arab-Islamic elements in Indonesian literature follows a three stage pattern: (1) direct adoption in the classical era, marked by the literal use of Arabic language and Arabic prosodic patterns; (2) localization in the late colonial era, marked by the translation of Arabic metaphors into local maritime and agrarian

symbols; and (3) recodification in the modern era, marked by the internalization of Islamic values into modern literary forms (novels, short stories, free verse) without the need to use Arabic vocabulary explicitly. These findings reject the simple dichotomy between “continuity” and “rupture”—what occurs instead is continuity at the level of values and discontinuity at the level of surface forms.

A comparative reading of classical Sufi *syair* (e.g., Hamzah Fansuri) against Arabic-Persian mystical poetics shows continuity at the level of core imaginaries (divine love, *tauhîd*, ascetic discipline), yet also a clear localization of symbols and narrative logic. Metaphors such as the “*perahu/boat*” reframe universal Sufi ethics into a maritime archipelagic experience, turning doctrinal concepts into everyday, spatially grounded images. In this sense, the Malay–Indonesian texts do not merely echo Arabic models, but innovate by coupling Islamic cosmology with local ecological and socio-economic realities.⁴⁰

This framework also clarifies period differences. In the early-modern courts of Aceh and Java, Arabic registers often functioned as epistemic authority (legitimizing knowledge and sanctity), whereas in the colonial-to-national period the visibility of Arabic diction could recede as authors negotiated modern schooling, print capitalism, and nationalist language politics. The shift from “*syair*” to “*poëzie/puisi*” is therefore not simply linguistic replacement but a change in literary institution and readership: modernist norms of genre and taste competed with older *adab*-based forms, even when Islamic themes remained persistent.⁴¹

Interpreting this terminological shift critically, the “disappearance” of Arabic-derived labels should not be equated with the disappearance of Arabic-Islamic repertoires. Rather, it indicates a re-coding of religious discourse into newer aesthetic and political languages: Islamic ethics may persist as subtext, imagery, and moral narrative while surface markers (terms, scripts) adapt to the standardizing pressures of national language and modern print genres. Such re-coding helps explain why modern Indonesian Islamic writing can look formally “modern” yet remain deeply intertextual with Qur’anic and Sufi archives.⁴²

Synthetically, this study shows that Arabic elements in Indonesian literature function as “symbolic capital” (*Bourdieu*) in three ways. First, as religious authorization: Arabic quotations or Arabic phrases provide legitimacy to the writer’s claims of moral truth. Second, as a marker of community boundaries: the use of Arabic elements marks that the readers targeted are Muslim communities who understand such references. Third, as a strategy of resistance: in the modern era, which is dominated by Western secular literature, the use of Arabic elements becomes a form of cultural resistance and literary decolonization. These three functions do not appear simultaneously in all periods—religious authorization is dominant in the classical era, community boundary is dominant in the colonial era, and strategy of resistance is dominant in the postcolonial era. This is a synthesis that explains why Arabic influence continues to persist even though its forms change.

Indonesian literature, which began in the 16th century, was filled with poets who wrote many literary works with Arabic literary patterns, such as Poetry and *Nazham*. Hamzah Fansuri wrote literary works, Syamsuddin Pasai, Abdurrauf Singkil, Nurddin Arraniri, Raja Ali Haji, and later period literature was heavily influenced by Arabic literature. Likewise, Hamka, Abdul Hadi W. M, KH. Musthafa Bisri, D. Zawawi Imron, Acep Zam Zam Nur, Aguk Irawan MN, Habiburrahman El Shirazy, Ahamd Fuadi, and Jamal D Rahmat are literary representations whose works are rich in Arabic literature and nuances.⁴³

From a critical-ideological angle, Arabic loanwords and citations function as more than ornament: they can operate as a strategy of moral authorization (grounding arguments in sacred text), boundary-making (defining who belongs to the imagined Islamic community), and ethical persuasion (inviting readers to internalize adab and prophetic exemplarity). However, the same strategy can become contested when different groups claim competing interpretive authority—e.g., between courtly Sufi cosmopolitanism, reformist scripturalism, and nationalist modernism—so that Arabic-Islamic intertexts also mark sites of tension, not only continuity.⁴⁴

Traces of Indonesian literary works influenced by Arabic literature can be seen in the Malay Arabic script. Many Arabic kinds of literature were translated into Malay and left behind patterns or genres of *hikayat*, *syair*, *rubai*, *gazal*, *masnawi*, and *barzanji*. This genre derived from Arabic literature has become a common literary fact. However, its influence on the authenticity of Indonesian literature is less analyzed, which also grows in the context of regional literature.

Arabic-derived labels (e.g., *syi'r*, *nazham*, *madaḥ*) became less prominent in the lexicon of modern Indonesian literature as colonial and nationalist language politics standardized Dutch/European-derived genre terms (*poëzie/puisi*). Yet, a decline in terminological visibility should not be read as the disappearance of Arabic-Islamic textual influence. Instead, the evidence suggests a re-routing of Arabic influence into other domains: translation publishing and religious print culture (Table 6), *pesantren* literary-performative traditions such as *nazhaman/lalaran*, and popular Islamic fiction where Arabic code-mixing functions as ethical authorization and identity marking. This reframing makes the claim empirically supportable: what changes is the arena of visibility, not the existence of Arabic-Islamic repertoires.

Arabic nuanced vocabulary had disappeared in Indonesian literature, such as poetry, *nazham*, *madaḥ*, and rhyme. When educated bumiputras in the Dutch East Indies began to write what came to be called poetry, they used a borrowed term from the Dutch language: *poëzie*, pronounced in their tongues: *poési*. Several essays by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana (STA) in *Pandji Poestaka* magazine in 1932 stated that the subject he was discussing was *poési*, a type of literary work previously named after the Arabic loanword, *syair*.⁴⁵

This paper shows the influence of Arabic literature not only on old literature but also on today. The influence of Arabic literature still exists, especially in literary works produced and produced and living in Islamic boarding schools. This existence is also marked by the presence of writers who still write with the style of poetry (instead of poetry) written in Arabic letters pego, and still use Arabic prosody patterns such as *nazham* and others. Not only poetry produced in contemporary times with Arabic nuances, but also stories. The stories produced by Indonesian literature are still heavily influenced by Arabic literature (Islamic literature), such as Habiburahman's and Helvi's works. The assumption that Indonesian writers are those who only write in Indonesian is not entirely justified.

Literature not only carries words, but it also carries ideology, views, culture, and issues. In some countries, not all literary works from outside can enter their countries because literature can bring changes in behavior, ideology, social, religious changes, and even influence security. The influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literature can also be seen in the influence of ideology and culture maintaining the terms in a literary work, such as maintaining the ideology in the literary work. The use of words derived from the Arabic language is closely related to idioms of Islamic teachings and culture because these words effectively describe the Javanese spiritual world when facing life's problems.⁴⁶

With Islamic elements found in Arabic literature, it was then composed in Javanese language and literature and combined with the Javanese mind.⁴⁷ Thus, if asked, is there Indonesianness in Indonesian literature? The answer is, of course, there is. However, Indonesianness or identity is not singular but very diverse and plural, as symbolized by *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The essence of Indonesia itself is diversity, plurality, and multiculturalism. Apart from this, Indonesian society has long been transitioning from a traditional society to a modern society that has begun to show a responsive, articulate, formulated, and argumentative character. This transition has affected the development of Indonesian literature toward multicultural literature.⁴⁸

In literary literature in Indonesia, religious literature, especially Islam, is not universally recognized. However, this religious literature seems to have become a separate genre. According to Teeuw, in the history of literature in Indonesia, religiosity is a universal theme that has been a literary theme since Hamzah Fansuri to Sutardji Calzoum Bachri. In addition, this theme is also a favorite theme for Sunan Bonang, Yasadipura II, Ranggawarsita III, Raja Ali Haji, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi, Sanusi Pane, Hamka, Amir Hamzah, Chairil Anwar, Achdiat Karta Mihardja, Bachrum Rangkuti, A. A. Navis, Jamil Suherman, Kuntowijoyo, Danarto, and Abdul Hadi W. M.⁴⁹

This study clarifies the influence of Arabic literature on Indonesian literature as a long and dialectical process—one marked by a tension between Arabic authority as the central source of religious reference and local agency that selectively adapts, rejects, or transforms Arabic elements according to the needs of the local context. In other words, Indonesian Islamic literature is not a passive reflection of Arabic literature, but rather

the result of an active negotiation between the global Islamic tradition and the local realities of the Nusantara. This synthetic understanding goes beyond simple description and provides a conceptual framework that can be used to analyze similar cases in other Muslim regions.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that Arabic–Islamic literary tradition has shaped Indonesian Islamic literature not only at the level of borrowed vocabulary but also through a durable repertoire of themes, genres, and ethical imaginaries. Across periods, Indonesian texts repeatedly rework Qur’anic and Sufi motifs—*tauḥīd*, divine love, ascetic discipline, and eschatological consciousness—while adapting recognizable forms such as *syair/nazham* patterns, devotional narratives, and rhyme/cadence conventions. These continuities help explain why Islamic ethical discourse remains legible in Indonesian literature even when Arabic elements become less overt in modern stylistic settings.

The main scholarly contribution is a period-spanning, text-based mapping of transmission and transformation: Arabic–Islamic tradition is approached as an ongoing cultural-literary resource rather than a one-time historical influence. Methodologically, the article operationalizes influence through intertextual evidence (themes, forms, and diction) and situates it within debates on cultural transmission and Islamization in the archipelago. This offers implications for Islamic literary studies (how *adab* and Sufi aesthetics travel across languages) and for Indonesian literary history (how Islamic repertoires coexist and compete with European-derived modernism).

This study is limited by the scope of the selected corpus and the reliance on library sources. Future research can extend the dataset with broader regional materials, digital literary platforms, and more systematic comparison with non-Islamic genres to measure where Arabic–Islamic repertoires are maintained, transformed, or contested in contemporary Indonesian literature.

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