



Arabic Grammar in Minangkabau Surau: Philological Perspectives on Traditional Islamic Education

Akhyar Hanif¹ ✉, Septika Rudiamon², Muhammad Fauzinudin Faiz³, Cut Afrina⁴,
Arifki Budia Warman⁵, Elvi Rahmi⁶

Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia^{1,4,5,6}

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Hikmah Pariangan Batusangkar, Indonesia²

Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia³

Corresponding e-mail: akhyarhanif@uinmybatusangkar.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to uncover the reasons why *Nahwu* manuscripts are found in almost every *surau* in Minangkabau and how *Nahwu*, a branch of Arabic grammar, was taught in these traditional Islamic educational institutions. This research is qualitative research employing a philological approach, which seeks to describe and reveal the phenomena surrounding *surau* education in Minangkabau. Based on the discovery of *Nahwu* manuscripts, and to explore the instructional process of *Nahwu* in these institutions. Primary data sources include several *Nahwu* manuscripts, along with the leaders of Inyik Jaho *Surau*, *Surau* Labai Sati Malalo, and the *Surau Syaikh* Abbas Padang Japang. Secondary data sources comprise various books, articles, and other related references. The research finds that the *Nahwu* manuscripts discovered in these *surau* represent the most authentic evidence of Islamic educational traditions in historical Minangkabau. *Nahwu* was not only considered essential for understanding religious texts but also regarded as an integral part of religious life. Instruction was delivered through the *sorogan* method, whereby teachers would recite and guide the memorization of *Nahwu* texts, translate them, and apply them to the study of other religious books. *Nahwu* material was taught progressively in three levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced, each with its respective classical texts.

Keywords: Nahwu, Surau Education, Arabic Manuscripts, Minangkabau.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini akan mengungkap mengapa manuskrip Nahwu ditemukan hampir di setiap surau di Minangkabau dan bagaimana ilmu Nahwu itu diajarkan pada lembaga pendidikan Islam tradisional Islam tersebut. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan filologi, yakni mendeskripsikan dan menyingkap fenomena yang terjadi pada pendidikan surau di Minangkabau berdasarkan temuan-temuan manuskrip Nahwu dan kemudian menyingkap bagaimana proses pembelajaran Nahwu di surau itu. Adapun sumber data primer penelitian ini adalah beberapa manuskrip Nahwu yang ditemukan, serta para pimpinan surau Inyik Jaho, surau Labai Sati Malalo, dan surau Syaikh Abbas Padang Japang. Sedangkan sumber data sekunder adalah beberapa literatur dari buku-buku, artikel, dan beberapa sumber terkait lainnya. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa manuskrip Nahwu yang ditemukan di surau-surau tersebut menjadi bukti paling autentik dari tradisi pengajaran Islam di Minangkabau tempo dulu, di mana ilmu Nahwu tidak saja dianggap penting untuk memahami teks-teks keagamaan tetapi

juga menjadi bagian dari keberagaman itu sendiri. Pengajaran Nahwu dilakukan dengan metode sorogan atau halaqah, di mana guru membacakan sembari menginstruksikan penghafalan matan atau nazham kitab Nahwu, menerjemahkannya, dan kemudian menerapkannya pada pembelajaran kitab-kitab lainnya. Sedang materi Nahwu diajarkan secara bertingkat, mulai pada tingkat mubtadi'in (elementary level), mutawassith (intermediate level) dan mutaqqaddim (advanced level) dengan kitabnya masing-masing.

Kata Kunci: *Nahwu*, Pendidikan Surau, Manuskrip Arab, Minangkabau

INTRODUCTION

Before the introduction of modern education by the Dutch colonial government, *surau* functioned as the primary traditional Islamic educational institutions in West Sumatra (Hasibuan, 2016; Zulman & Samad, 2024). These institutions, deeply rooted in Minangkabau culture, were central to the transmission of Islamic knowledge, producing generations of Islamic scholars who played significant roles in the Islamization of the Indonesian archipelago (Alfurqan et al., 2025). The development of the Surau in Minangkabau as an educational institution in the past can be divided into several periods. The early period lasted from the 7th to the 13th centuries AD, when the surau began to develop as a gathering place for adult men to discuss customary matters and hold deliberations. With the arrival of Islam, the surau transformed into a center for education and the dissemination of Islamic teachings. The surau became a place to study religious knowledge, such as the introduction of the shahada, prayer procedures, and reading the Qur'an. Then, from the 17th to the early 20th centuries AD, which is known as the classical period and marked the peak of the surau's glory at that time, the surau developed into a more structured and formal educational institution, with a broader curriculum, including the science of *fiqh*, tauhid, Sufism, and Arabic. The surau adapted in several ways, such as its transformation into a *Madrasah Diniyah* (Islamic Madrasah) that focused on non-formal religious education. Furthermore, the surau also became a center for social and religious movements, as well as a hiding place for fighters or the dissemination of anti-colonial ideas. In the modern or post-independence period until now, surau remains relevant in forming morals, maintaining religious identity, and strengthening the social ties of Minangkabau society. Surau has innovated to become a center for memorizing the Koran, a center for youth and community development, as well as a center for social and religious activities. Apart from that, surau also collaborates with formal schools to provide additional or extracurricular religious education.

Over centuries, the *surau* nurtured a strong manuscript tradition, with teachers (known as *syaiikh*, *buya*, or *ungku*) not only instructing but also composing and copying religious texts. One of the most consistently found subjects in these manuscripts is *Nahwu*—Arabic grammar—highlighting its foundational role in Islamic education (Al-Barhamtoshy et al., 2023; Zafar & Iqbal, 2022). Field studies conducted between 2018 and 2023 have revealed the continued existence of *Nahwu* manuscripts in many villages, from Sijunjung Regency and Pesisir Selatan Regency to Tanah Datar Regency, indicating the widespread and systematic inclusion of *Nahwu* in surau-based education. In 2018, 5 *Nahwu* manuscripts were found in Sijunjung Regency, while in 2019, 1 *Nahwu* manuscript was found in Pesisir Selatan Regency, and in 2023, 1 manuscript was found in Tanah Datar Regency (Hanif et al., 2018).

Despite the abundance of manuscript evidence, there is a noticeable gap in scholarly literature on the relationship between the presence of *Nahwu* manuscripts and the educational

system of *surau*. A previous 2022 study on Minangkabau Arabic manuscripts offered a transliteration and brief translation of several *Nahwu* texts but fell short in analyzing the pedagogical or institutional context in which these texts were taught and preserved (Al-Barhamtoshy et al., 2023; Zafar & Iqbal, 2022). Historically, the *surau* (Islamic prayer house) as an educational institution plays a crucial role in the dissemination and preservation of Islamic knowledge, including the science of *Nahwu* (Islamic grammar). Pedagogical analysis and institutional context can help understand how *Nahwu* manuscripts were used in the learning and teaching process at the *surau*. Socially, the *surau* serves not only as a place of education but also as a center for social and religious activities. Institutional context analysis can help understand how the *surau* interacts with the community and how *Nahwu* manuscripts are used within that social context. In the educational context, pedagogical analysis can help understand how *Nahwu* manuscripts are used in the learning and teaching process at the *surau*. This can help understand how *Nahwu* science is taught and how students understand *Nahwu* concepts. A philological approach is used to analyze *Nahwu* manuscript texts, which can help understand the content and structure of the texts, as well as how the texts are used in the learning and teaching process at the *surau*. Furthermore, philological analysis can also help understand how *Nahwu* manuscripts are used as sources of knowledge and how they are understood by students and teachers at the *surau*. Through an ethnographic approach, observations and interviews with the community and teachers at the *surau* can help understand the institutional and pedagogical context in which the *Nahwu* manuscript is used. Furthermore, an ethnographic approach can also help understand how the *surau* interacts with the community and how the *Nahwu* manuscript is used within that social context. Therefore, by using a philological and ethnographic approach simultaneously, researchers can understand how the *Nahwu* manuscript is used in the learning and teaching process at the *surau*, as well as how the *surau* interacts with the community. In particular, there has been no focused inquiry into *why* *Nahwu* manuscripts are ubiquitous in Minangkabau, or *how* *Nahwu* was systematically taught in the traditional *surau* setting. While scholars have addressed the broader role of *surau* in Islamic education (Adam et al., 2022; MAE (Kunstkamera), RAS & Kudriavtceva, 2023) and manuscript culture (Contadini, 2022; Vernay-Nouri, 2022) little has been written on *Nahwu* as a distinct subject of instruction within that system (Hanif & Rudiamon, 2022).

This paper aims to fill that gap by exploring the specific role of *Nahwu* in traditional Islamic education in Minangkabau. This paper investigates two core research questions, first, why is the *Nahwu* script found in almost every traditional *surau* in Minangkabau? and second, how is the science of *Nahwu* taught in these institutions?. This question, if specified operationally, will accompany several questions that can collect relevant and accurate data to answer the research questions and understand how the *Nahwu* script is used in traditional *surau* in Minangkabau. Among these questions are How is the *Nahwu* script used in the learning and teaching process in traditional *surau* in Minangkabau?, What are the teaching methods of *Nahwu* science used in traditional *surau* in Minangkabau?, 'How do teachers in traditional *surau* in Minangkabau understand and teach the concepts of *Nahwu* to students?', and What is the role of the *Nahwu* script in the formation of curriculum and educational programs in traditional *surau* in Minangkabau?.

This study builds on fieldwork data and philological evidence to uncover the educational logic behind *Nahwu's* prominence. Drawing on both textual and ethnographic sources, this study argues that *Nahwu* instruction in *surau* was conducted through structured pedagogical

stages—*mubtadi'in* (elementary), *mutawassit* (intermediate), and *mutaqaddim* (advanced)—each anchored in classical texts. Teaching was conducted using methods such as *sorogan* and *halaqah*, involving recitation, memorization, translation, and contextual application. By mapping this curriculum, the paper positions Nahwu as both an epistemic pillar and a cultural artefact of Minangkabau Islam, thereby contributing to broader discussions on manuscript traditions, Islamic pedagogy, and local knowledge systems in Southeast Asia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a philological approach, which has six working steps: manuscript inventory, manuscript description, manuscript grouping and text comparison, selection of text edition method, transliteration, and additional study (text commentary). This research will inventory all manuscripts that are still scattered in various community scriptoriums or private collections of community members. Next, the researcher describes the manuscripts to obtain a general picture of the manuscripts' physical appearance. The researcher then sorts the manuscripts and compares the texts to be transliterated according to their respective content. After determining the texts to be studied, the researcher chooses a text edition method. In this step, the researcher chooses the diplomatic edition method, meaning the researcher only edits the text purely without any text interpretation. Next, the researcher transliterates the text from Arabic and *Pegon* scripts into Latin script. The final step is additional study, namely "reading" the manuscripts in their context or contextualizing the texts, or in other words, using the lens of other disciplines to explain the meaning of the texts to make them feel more alive.

The philological approach is used to aim to examine the *surau* education system in Minangkabau through the discovery of *Nahwu* manuscripts and to describe the teaching processes involved. In other words, the research seeks to uncover historical phenomena within *surau*-based education and provide an in-depth analysis of how *Nahwu* was taught in these institutions. The primary data sources for this study consist of several *Nahwu* manuscripts discovered in Minangkabau, as well as the leaders of three key *surau*: Inyik Jaho (now MTI Jaho), Surau *Syaikh* Abbas Padang Japang, and the leadership of the MTI Malalo foundation. Secondary data sources include books, scholarly articles, and other relevant documentary materials.

Data collection techniques involved direct observation and manuscript tracing at various local scriptoria, commonly referred to as manuscript inventories. In addition, interviews were conducted with descendants of prominent Minangkabau *ulama*, including the leaders of Inyik Jaho *surau*, the descendants of Inyik Zakaria Malalo, the lineage of Syaikh Abbas Padang Japang, and other related parties. The study also relied on official documents from the associated *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) or foundations. As a philological study, this research primarily relies on ancient texts (manuscripts) as its principal data and sources. All *Nahwu* manuscripts found in the aforementioned *surau*, which have yet to receive scholarly attention from mainstream researchers, are treated as primary data. Supporting data include literature related to *Nahwu* and traditional Islamic education in Minangkabau. Lastly, other materials—whether directly or indirectly connected—such as previously published philological works, past philological research findings, and relevant theoretical frameworks, were also utilized in the analysis.

RESULTS

The *Nahwu* Manuscripts and the Role of *Surau* in the Islamic Educational Tradition of Minangkabau

The majority of regions in West Sumatra—excluding the Mentawai Islands—have long served as vital repositories of manuscript heritage. Both highland (*darek*) and coastal (*rantau*) areas once hosted vibrant *scriptoria* that functioned as centers of intellectual activity in Minangkabau society (Pramono, 2018). Numerous philological surveys and archival studies confirm the abundance of Minangkabau manuscripts, which are now preserved not only in various repositories across West Sumatra but also in prominent national and international collections, including those in Jakarta, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Malaysia (Al-Homed et al., 2022; Garcia Probert & Sijpesteijn, 2022; Pramono et al., 2018). This dispersion reflects the richness of Minangkabau’s written culture and the historical depth of its intellectual civilization.

These textual legacies—numbering in the hundreds, if not thousands—are preserved in libraries and archives worldwide (Alghamdi et al., 2021; Maouloud & Ba, 2024). In Indonesia, notable collections include the National Library (78 manuscripts), the Adityawarman Museum (94 manuscripts), the West Sumatra Regional Archives, and the Philology Laboratory at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Andalas University (20 manuscripts). Internationally, Zuriati’s catalog identifies 383 Minangkabau manuscripts housed in libraries in the Netherlands (261), the United Kingdom (102), Germany (19), and Malaysia (1) (Susena et al., 2013). Despite these efforts, many manuscripts remain in private family collections and await scholarly attention.

Recent fieldwork reveals that *Nahwu* manuscripts—works on Arabic grammar—are among the most commonly preserved texts within these community collections. The following table provides a sample of such findings:

Table 1. Fieldwork Findings of *Nahwu* Manuscripts in Minangkabau

N o	Year of Research	Owner /Heir	Location	Discovered Manuscripts	Code
1	2018	Martini	Jorong Bukik Gombak, Nagari Padang Laweh, Kec. Koto VII, Kab. Sijunjung, Sumatera Barat	1. Nahwu 2. Nahwu 3. Nahwu 4. Nahwu 5. Nahwu	1. 08/BG.III/nhw/2 018 2. 09/BG.III/nhw/2 018 3. 10/BG.III/nhw/2 018 4. 11/BG.III/nhw/2 018 5. 12/BG.III/nhw/2 018
2	2019	Mande Rubiah	Nagari Lunang, Kec. Lunang, Kab. Pesisir Selatan, Sumatera Barat	Nahwu	08/LNG.II/nhw/20 19

3	2023	Febrian di	Nagari Laweh, Kec. Sungai Tarab, Kab. Tanah Datar, Sumatera Barat	Pasie Nahwu	05/PsL/IV/nhw/20 23
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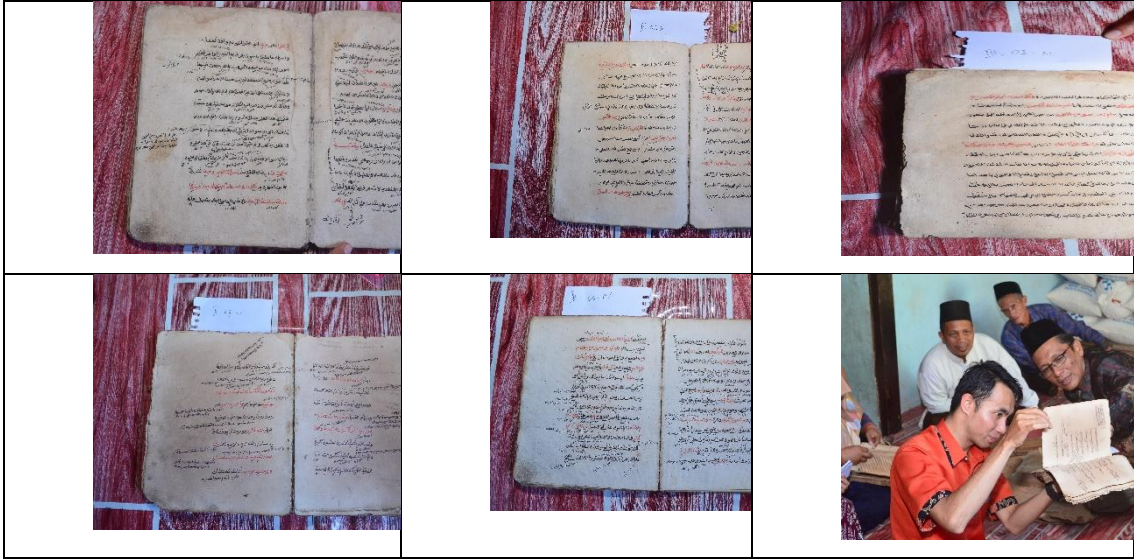


Figure 1. Inventory of the Bukit Gombak Manuscripts, Padang Laweh Village, Sijunjung.



Figure 2. Inventory of Lunang Manuscripts, Pesisir Selatan

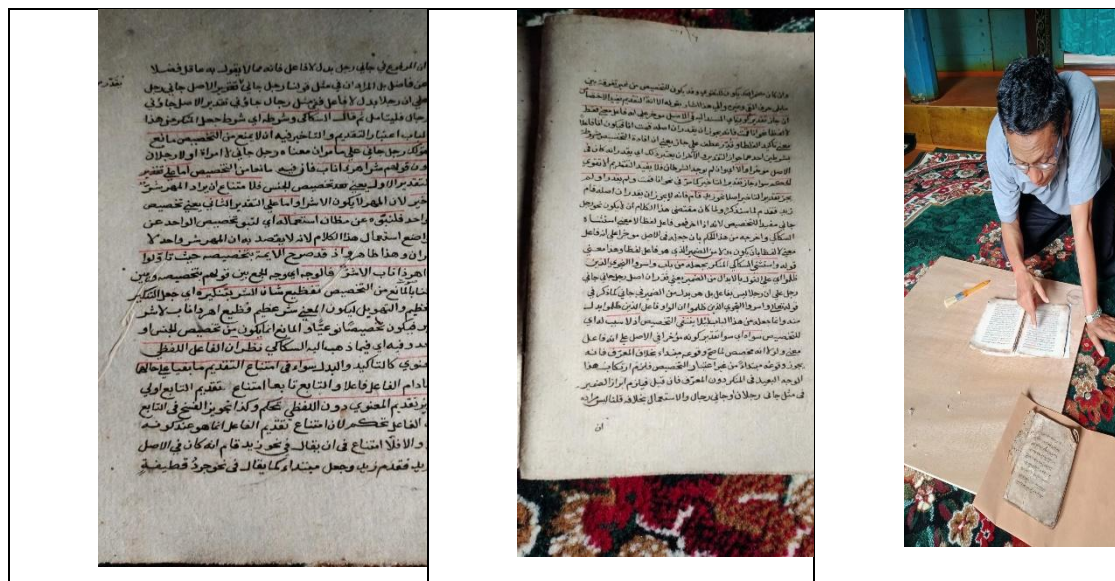


Figure 3. Inventory of Pasie Laweh Manuscripts, Sungai Tarab, Tanah Datar.

These findings confirm that *Nahwu* manuscripts remain widespread across Minangkabau, often accompanied by other Islamic texts such as Qur'anic exegesis, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Sufism, theology, and devotional literature. Most of the manuscripts are in good condition and remain legible, though some show signs of biological degradation, such as termite damage.

The proliferation of *Nahwu* manuscripts is closely tied to the role of *surau*, which historically served as the indigenous institutions of Islamic education. These grassroots centers were pivotal to the Islamization of Minangkabau and later functioned as strongholds of cultural and political resistance—especially during the colonial period when they were affiliated with Sufi *ṭarīqah* orders (Azra, 2003). Before the introduction of Western-style schooling by the Dutch, *surau* constituted the primary system of Islamic education in West Sumatra (Contadini, 2022; Vernay-Nouri, 2022). Success in these institutions was not merely measured by Qur'anic literacy but also by moral integrity, mastery of Minangkabau custom, oral literature, and local martial arts such as *pencak silat* (Kharles & Nazmi, 2015).

Over time, the educational functions of the *surau* became more systematized and sophisticated. Many scholars believe that the *surau* system has been in place since the earliest introduction of Islam to the region. From these institutions emerged influential scholars whose intellectual legacies shaped the Islamic landscape of the Indonesian archipelago. For more than three centuries, *surau* served as nodes in a dynamic Islamic knowledge network (Adam et al., 2022; MAE (Kunstkamera), RAS & Kudriavtceva, 2023). They facilitated the transfer of knowledge and the development of Islamic identity in Minangkabau.

As sites of knowledge transmission, *surau* fostered complex teacher–student relationships that facilitated the replication and dissemination of manuscripts. Teachers—often referred to as *syaiikh*, *buya*, or *ungku*—not only instructed orally but also authored and copied texts as part of the educational process. This pedagogical function of manuscript production illustrates the organic link between Minangkabau Islamic education and the manuscript tradition (Hanif et al., 2018).

The integration of Islam into Minangkabau identity owes much to these early scholars. As Islam spread from the Arab world, Minangkabau scholars and *ulama* adapted its teachings to the local cultural matrix. Over time, Islam became so deeply embedded in Minangkabau society that religious affiliation and ethnic identity were practically synonymous. The oft-

repeated phrase “To be Minangkabau is to be Muslim” illustrates how Islamic values became a central pillar of communal belonging. A Minangkabau who does not identify as Muslim is often seen as estranged from the cultural body.

Minangkabau *surau* can generally be classified into two categories. First are the *small surau*, akin to contemporary *mushalla*, which served neighborhood religious and educational needs. Often named after local topographical or cultural features, such as Surau Batu, Surau Manggih, or Surau Kasik, these were typically led by modest religious teachers. Second are the *large surau*, which gained prominence through the scholarly stature of their leaders and gradually evolved into full-fledged educational centers. These were often named after their founders—e.g., Surau Inyik Jaho (Syaiikh Muhammad Djamil Jaho), Surau Inyik Parabek (Syaiikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek), and Surau Inyik Candung (Syaiikh Sulaiman al-Rasuli). Many of these institutions continue to function today, though their form and designation have evolved.

As the Indonesian state began regulating education, the nomenclature of these institutions changed. Many prominent *surau* transitioned into *madrasah* institutions—such as Madrasah Thawalib Parabek, Madrasah Thawalib Padang Panjang, and Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah (MTI) Candung—and later became part of the broader Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) system by the early 20th century. Despite these transformations, their foundational role in transmitting Islamic knowledge remains central to Minangkabau religious and intellectual history.

Syaiikh Muhammad Djamil and Surau Balenggek Jaho

Syaiikh Muhammad Djamil was born in Jaho, Tanah Datar Regency, in 1875 CE. His father, Datuk Garang, served as a *qadhi* in Tambangan, while his mother’s name was Umbuik. He studied under several prominent *ulama* in Minangkabau, including Syaiikh al-Jufri in Gunung Rajo, Batipuh (1888–1893), Syaiikh al-Ayubi in Tanjung Bungo, Padang Ganting (1893–1899), Tuanku Nan Tuo in Koto Tuo, Agam (1899–1900), and Syaiikh Abdullah in Halaban as well as Syaiikh Sa’ad in Koto Tuo Mungka, Lima Puluh Kota (1900–1908).

In 1908, Syaiikh Djamil traveled to Mecca to study Islamic sciences under Syaiikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, then the Mufti of Mecca. He studied there for ten years and received *ijazah* (certification) from three prominent scholars: Syaiikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Syaiikh Alwi al-Maliki, and Syaiikh Mukhtar al-‘Affani. In 1918, he returned to Minangkabau and began preaching and teaching across West Sumatra. In 1924, he revisited Mecca for pilgrimage and further studies, returning in 1925. That same year, he began teaching in Surau Balenggek, Jaho, using the *halaqah* system. On May 5, 1928, the surau was formalized into a madrasah and became known as Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah (MTI) Jaho.

MTI Jaho was established in response to the growing need for structured and modern Islamic education. From the outset, the institution focused on religious instruction delivered through systematic methods. Initially, learning was conducted through *halaqah* in the surau. As the institution evolved, it moved to larger locations with improved facilities. Although it encountered internal conflicts that led to relocation, with strong community support, MTI Jaho eventually secured permanent premises and expanded its curriculum. Today, it remains a respected Islamic educational institution known for producing students with both moral character and religious knowledge.

Syaiikh Muhammad Djamil authored many works, including *Tadzkiarah al-Qulub fi Murāqabah ‘Allām al-Ghuyūb*, *Nujūm al-Hidāyah fi Radd ‘alā Ahl al-Ghivāyah*, *Sumūs al-Lāmiyyah fi ‘Aqīdah Ahl al-Diyānah*, *Suluh Bendang*, *Hujjah al-Balighah*, *Maqālah al-Radhiyyah*, and *Kashshāfah al-‘Anīshah fi Sharh Matn al-‘Ajurrūmiyyah*.

Kashshafah al-‘Awṣab fī Sharḥ Matn al-Ājurūmiyyah is a commentary on the widely recognized Nahwu primer *Matn al-Ājurūmiyyah*. Though intended to consist of three volumes, only the first volume has been found—an old printed edition with 76 pages.



Figure 4. Book *Kasyāfah al-‘Awīshah fī Syarḥ Matn al-Ājurūmiyah*

This work serves as a testament to Syaikh Djamil’s expertise in Arabic grammar. It provides comprehensive commentary, including detailed grammatical analysis (*i‘rāb*) of the original *matn*. The book enhances the body of Minangkabau scholarly literature in the field of Arabic grammar, which is relatively rare, as most local scholars tended to write on *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *tafsīr*, or *ṭarīqah* teachings. One exception is Syaikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek, who wrote on *balāghah* in his work *Hidāyah al-Ṣibyān* (Hanif, 2008).

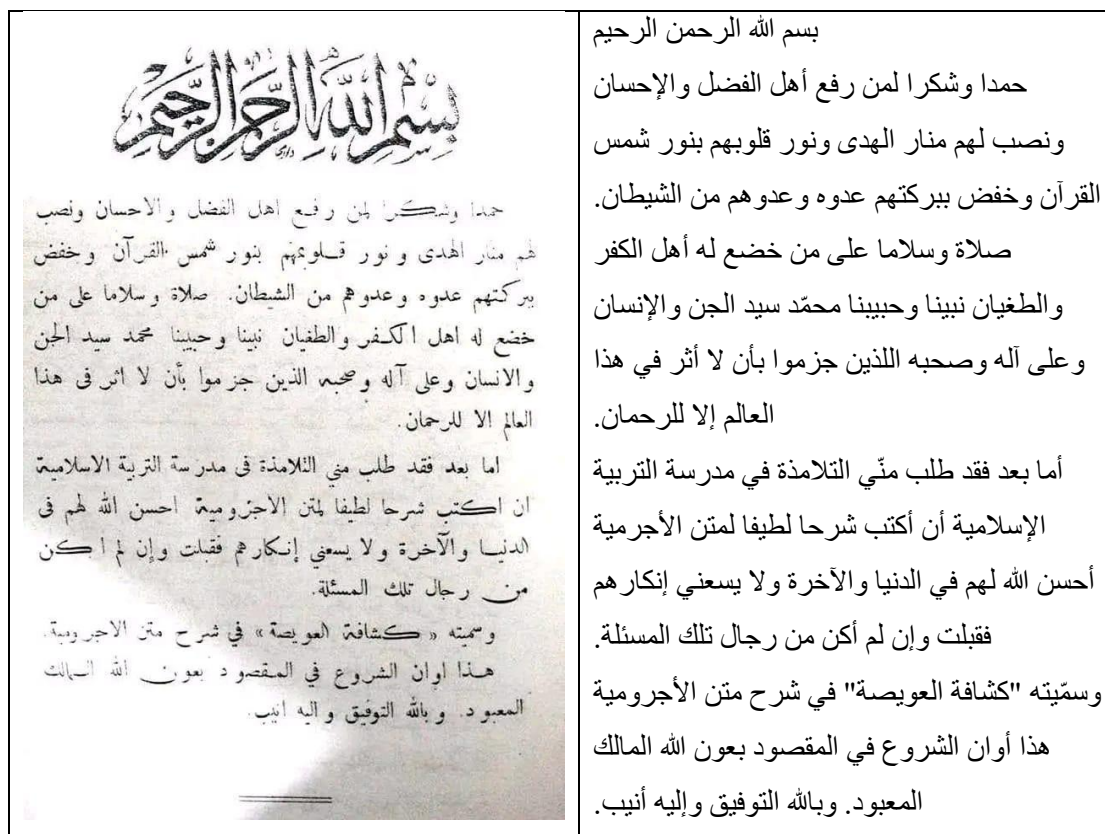


Figure 5. Introduction to the Book of Kasyāfah al-‘Awīshah fī Syarḥ Matn al-Ajurūmiyah

In the preface to *Kashshāfah al-‘Awīshah*, Syaikh Djamil notes that the work was composed at the request of his students at MTI Jaho. He writes:

“As for what follows, the students of Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah have asked me to write a concise and accessible commentary on *Matn al-‘Ajurūmiyyah*. May God grant them well-being in this world and the Hereafter. Although I am not among the great scholars of this science, I accepted their request out of my deep affection for them.”

This affirms his recognized authority in the field of Nahwu and his efforts to make the subject accessible and enjoyable for his students.

Syaikh Djamil’s method of teaching Nahwu followed the classical tradition: he began by reciting and translating the *matn* of *‘Ajurūmiyyah*, which students repeated aloud. He then explained the content and instructed students to memorize the verses. This pedagogical approach emphasized rhythmic memorization of *naẓm* or prose texts, following the *sorogan* method (Murtafiah, 2021).

Today, MTI Jaho implements a pesantren-style curriculum, with approximately 70% of subjects devoted to Arabic-language religious texts and only 30% allocated to general education subjects, primarily to meet national exam requirements. Nahwu is taught at three levels: elementary (*mubtadi’īn*), intermediate (*mutawassit*), and advanced (*mutaqaddim*). Texts include *Matn al-‘Ajurūmiyyah*, *Mukhtaṣar Jiddan*, *Kawākib al-Durriyyah*, *Alfiyyah Ibn Malīk*, *Sharḥ Qaṭr al-Nadā*, *Sharḥ Ibn ‘Aqīl*, and *Ḥāshiyah al-Khudrī*. The instructional method is traditional, using the *baramulo* or *maojok* system (Amri et al., 2024).

Among his most notable students were Syaikh Zakaria Labai Sati Malalo, Buya H. Muhammad Dalil Syarif Datuak Maninjun, Syaikh Abdullah Aminuddin Tuanku Salih, Syaikh Muhammad Waly Labuhan Haji (Abuya Muda Waly), Buya H. Mansur Datuk Nagari Basa, Buya H. Umar Bakri, Buya H. Baharuddin Ar-Rasuli, and Buya H. Ma’ana Hasnuty Datuk Tan

Pahlawan. Syaikh Djamil passed away on November 2, 1945, and was buried in the MTI Jaho compound

Syaikh Zakaria Labai Sati and Surau Tinggi Malalo

Syaikh Zakaria Labai Sati was born in Padang Laweh, Malalo, Tanah Datar Regency, in 1908 CE. From 1916 to 1918, he attended the *Sekolah Rakyat* (People's School) in Pasar Malalo. He later pursued Islamic studies at Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah (MTI) Jaho under the guidance of Syaikh Muhammad Djamil Jaho. Additionally, he studied *Naqshbandiyyah* Sufism under Maulana Syaikh Ja'far of Pulau Gadang, Kampar Regency.

According to interviews with MTI Malalo foundation leaders, Syaikh Zakaria's spiritual lineage (*silsilah*) in the *Naqshbandiyyah* order traced back to Maulana Syaikh Khalid al-Kurdi: from Syaikh Zakaria to Syaikh Ja'far Pulau Gadang, then to Syaikh Abdurrahman Tanjuang Alai, followed by Syaikh Mahmud Alin ad-Dili, then Syaikh Abdurrahman ad-Dili, and ultimately to Maulana Syaikh Khalid al-Kurdi an-Naqshbandi, whose lineage reaches the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). According to Syaikh Idrus of Batu Basurek, Kampar, Syaikh Zakaria also studied Sufism under Syaikh Abdul Ghani of Batu Basurek. When Tuanku Laskar visited Batu Basurek, Syaikh Idrus pointed out the chamber where Syaikh Zakaria received his spiritual guidance (*irshad*).

Syaikh Zakaria passed away on October 8, 1973 CE. He was known for his expertise in logic (*mantiq*) and Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Among his prominent students were: Tgk. H. Zamzami Zamra (leader of Dayah Darul Hasanah Syaikh Abdurrauf Singkel, South Aceh), Tgk. H. Abdul Aziz Calang (Dayah Patik Calang, West Aceh), Tgk. H. Baharuddin Tawar (Dayah Mulhallimin Tanah Merah, Singkel), Tgk. Baidhawi (Dayah Shabul Yamin, South Aceh), Tgk. Muhammad Rasyid (Dayah Dayul Yakin, Singkel), Tuanku Ali Amran Ringan Ringan (Pondok Pesantren Nurul Yaqin, Pariaman), Tgk. Armin Kemunus (Labuhan Haji, South Aceh), and Tgk. Ibrahim Lamo (West Aceh), among others whose names have not yet been documented.

In 1930, Syaikh Zakaria established a *madrasah* in Padang Laweh, Malalo, which originally operated as a *surau*. He applied the same Nahwu teaching methods as his teacher, Syaikh Muhammad Djamil, emphasizing the traditional instructional model. According to the foundation leaders of MTI Malalo, prior to the *madrasah*'s founding, Syaikh Zakaria taught at smaller *surau* along the shores of Lake Singkarak in the Malalo region. He conducted evening sessions to review materials with senior instructors who would be teaching the following day.

Syaikh Zakaria's approach to teaching Nahwu was unique: he did not focus on Nahwu texts per se, but rather applied Nahwu theory directly within the study of core Islamic texts, such as *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, *fiqh*, and *'aqidah* books. According to interviews, Syaikh Zakaria was especially proficient in *fiqh*, and his Nahwu expertise was demonstrated through his application of grammar while interpreting *fiqh* texts. The books he taught included *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, *al-Maḥallī* (a *fiqh* text), *Idāḥ Mubham* (logic), *Latā'if al-Ishārāt* (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and several others.

Syaikh Abbas Abdullah and Surau Ruyuang Padang Japang

Syaikh Abbas Abdullah was born in 1883 in Padang Japang, Lima Puluh Kota Regency. He was the son of Syaikh Abdullah Datuk Jabok, a prominent Minangkabau scholar and follower of Tuanku Imam Bonjol during the Padri War. His mother, Seko, was a native of Padang Japang. Syaikh Abbas was the youngest of six siblings. His eldest brother was Syaikh Muhammad Shalih, followed by Syaikh Mustafa Abdullah—both sharing the same parents. His half-siblings from another mother included Syaikh Muhammad Said, Sa'adah, and Sa'adud. Four of the six siblings became respected religious scholars.

Before going to Mecca, Syaikh Abbas studied under Buya Taram at Surau Pandam Gadang and also under his own father. The early instruction he received followed the *halaqah* method, reflecting the traditional orientation of his father. At the age of 13, Syaikh Abbas traveled to Mecca with his uncle, where he pursued Islamic studies with several scholars, including Syaikh H. Latief Syakur, Syaikh Muhammad Djamil Jambek, and Syaikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, among others, at the Masjid al-Haram. He remained in Mecca for approximately eight years before returning to Padang Japang in 1904.

Syaikh Abbas, together with his brother Syaikh Mustafa Abdullah, developed the *surau* established by their father in 1854 into a formal Islamic boarding school known as *Pondok Pesantren Darul Funun El-Abbasiyah*. Originally called Surau Ruyuang, the *surau* followed the traditional *halaqah* method. Syaikh Abbas assisted his father in managing and teaching at the institution. The name “Ruyuang” derived from the *surau*’s initial construction, which utilized palm trunks and fronds.

After several years of teaching at the family *surau*, Syaikh Abbas modernized the system by transitioning from *halaqah* to a classroom-based structure. This transformation was motivated by his desire to align the *surau*’s educational methods with those practiced in Middle Eastern institutions. Accordingly, he introduced texts commonly used at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt.

Like Syaikh Zakaria Labai Sati, Syaikh Abbas Abdullah did not teach Nahwu as a stand-alone subject using primary Nahwu texts such as *Matn al-Ājurrūmiyyah*, *Mukhtaṣar Jiddan*, or *Kawākib al-Durriyyah*. Instead, he integrated Nahwu instruction into the study of other disciplines, such as *tafsir* and *fiqh*. Students would record grammatical rules and relevant insights in their personal notes during these lessons. His preferred teaching method was the traditional *sorogan* model.

Syaikh Abbas passed away on Monday, June 17, 1957, at the age of 74. He was buried in the family cemetery in Padang Japang, Nagari VII Koto Talago, Guguak District, Lima Puluh Kota Regency. According to interviews with his students, Syaikh Abbas authored several manuscripts, but most were destroyed during Dutch military aggression. Only a few fragments survived the widespread burning. Despite efforts to locate these works through archival searches at Surau Ruyuang and other sources, the manuscripts remain unrecovered. It is possible that they were hidden by his students or discarded by individuals unaware of their value.

DISCUSSION

The discovery of numerous Nahwu manuscripts across Minangkabau regions serves as compelling evidence that this field of knowledge was systematically taught in traditional Islamic educational institutions, such as *surau* and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), of the past. This finding not only reflects enthusiasm for linguistic studies alone, but also indicates a high level of epistemological awareness in building a strong foundation for Islamic scholarship through a linguistic approach. In this context, the teaching of Nahwu and *Ṣarf* is not merely a supplement, but rather an essential tool for opening access to the treasures of classical Islamic knowledge composed in high-level Arabic.

The Qur’an, as the central text in Islam has a complex language structure, full of nuances of meaning, and is very sensitive to grammatical changes. In order to study the Qur’an and classical Arabic texts—such as those on *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions), and *‘aqīdah* (Islamic theology)—students were required to master Nahwu and *ṣarf* (morphology) as linguistic tools. Without a solid foundation in these subjects, students would struggle to extract accurate meanings from the religious texts. Therefore, mastery of Nahwu and *Ṣarf* by students is an absolute requirement

for accurately interpreting, understanding, and reasoning about the contents of these texts. Without a solid linguistic foundation, interpretation of religious texts is vulnerable to distortion of meaning and can even lead to a misconception of Islamic teachings themselves.

In the context of Islamic teaching (*ta'lim*), scholars often took the initiative to write or copy these essential sciences, including Nahwu, to facilitate their transmission to students. In some cases, students themselves copied their teachers' texts for use in future instruction. This educational tradition resulted in a rich legacy of Nahwu manuscripts preserved throughout Minangkabau. Thus, the presence of these manuscripts simultaneously shows that the scientific tradition in Minangkabau has integrated Arabic language knowledge into the framework of Islamic education as part of a systematic and sustainable intellectual heritage.

The traditional Minangkabau *surau* educational system has several distinctive characteristics that reflect the depth of classical Islamic scholarly heritage as well as local adaptations of Middle Eastern educational models, particularly those of Mecca and Medina. One key feature is the use of the *balaqah* system—study groups centered on the authority of a teacher (*tuanku* or *syaiikh*)—rather than the formal classroom format adopted in the modern school system. In *balaqah*, the learning process is dialogical, intensive, and contemplative, where the relationship between teacher and student is not only instructional but also transformative, with an emphasis on *adab* (ethics) as part of the transmission of knowledge. The absence of a rigid time limit for completing a text reflects an educational paradigm that emphasizes the process of in-depth understanding (*tahqiq*) rather than simply achieving curriculum or academic targets. Thus, time is not seen as a determinant of graduation but rather as a contemplative space for the internalization of knowledge.

Furthermore, teaching methods that prioritize memorization of *naẓm* (rhymed poetry) or *matn* (concise prose) texts demonstrate a pedagogical approach that relies on orality and musicality as strategies for retention and internalization of meaning. These texts are read with distinctive melodic intonation, creating a continuity between the cognitive and affective aspects of the learning process. This is not merely a matter of aesthetics but has a psychopedagogical dimension, where melody functions as a memory enhancer and a tool for awakening spiritual sensitivity. This model mimics the teaching methods of the Grand Mosque and classical *madrasah* in the *Hijaz*, which place memorization as the initial gateway to in-depth understanding and critical *ijtihad*. In other words, *surau* education not only transmits knowledge but also shapes holistic intellectual and spiritual character through educational mechanisms that include *talaqqi* (direct transmission from teacher to student), *tafaqquh* (deepening of meaning), and *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul). This is what makes the *surau* system not just an educational institution but also a center for the inheritance of Islamic scientific traditions that live and are rooted in Minangkabau society.

The pedagogical model for *Nahwu* instruction in Minangkabau's *surau* system has deep roots in the Islamic scholarly tradition. *Nahwu* was frequently taught alongside other Islamic sciences in the *surau*, which functioned as both community learning centers and preparatory schools for young scholars. The goal was to build foundational skills in Arabic grammar, essential for accessing Islamic scripture and commentaries (Hudawi et al., 2021).

One of the main methods employed by the *ulama* of the time was the *sorogan* method (Murtafiah, 2021). In this system, the teacher recited a *Nahwu matn*, and the students repeated it. The teacher would then translate it into the Minangkabau language—known locally as *baramulo*—or what some refer to as the *maojok* method (Amri et al., 2024). For example: “الباب الأول” (*al-bāb al-awwal*) would be translated as *baramulo ini baalab baramulo satu bab pado manyatokan*. This approach emphasized rote memorization of *Nahwu* texts and examples from within the texts themselves, though examples rarely extended beyond the provided standard ones like *qāma Zaydun 'Amran* or *ḍaraba Zaydun 'Amran*.

The teaching of *Nahwu* (Arabic grammar) in the traditional *surau* education system of Minangkabau followed a structured, hierarchical approach, consisting of three progressive levels tailored to the students' learning stages. At the elementary level (*mubtadi'in*), students were introduced to basic grammar through concise and accessible texts such as *Matn al-Ajurrūmiyyah* and *Mukhtaṣar Jiddan*. These works laid the foundational rules of Arabic syntax and morphology in a simplified manner. As students advanced to the intermediate stage (*mutawassit*), they engaged with more elaborate texts like *Kawākib al-Durriyyah* and the renowned *Alfiyyah Ibn Malik*, a thousand-line didactic poem encapsulating comprehensive grammatical rules. This stage required memorization, explanation, and early analytical skills. Finally, at the advanced level (*mutaqaddim*), students delved into deeper exegetical and theoretical discussions using classical commentaries such as *Sharḥ Ibn 'Aqil* on *Alfiyyah Ibn Malik*, along with *Qaṭr al-Nadā* and *Ḥāshiyah al-Khudrī*, which demanded mastery of both theory and application. This tiered curriculum reflects not only the intellectual discipline embedded in the *surau* system but also the pedagogical sophistication rooted in the Islamic scholarly tradition of West Sumatra.

Although this traditional model worked effectively in its time, contemporary challenges remain. These include the scarcity of updated teaching materials and the need for innovative pedagogical strategies. Future research is necessary to design curricula that both preserve traditional *Nahwu* knowledge and adapt it to modern educational contexts (Mayuasti & Prahara, 2022; Hudawi et al., 2021). In this way, the Minangkabau *surau* system offers a compelling synthesis of rich tradition and future potential, ensuring that *Nahwu* remains a vital part of Islamic learning for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the presence of *Nahwu* (Arabic grammar) manuscripts in Minangkabau *surau* represents a significant and previously underappreciated dimension of Islamic knowledge transmission in the region. Contrary to longstanding assumptions that traditional Islamic education in West Sumatra was predominantly oral and memorization-based, the findings demonstrate a complex pedagogical structure supported by a manuscript culture that sustained written scholarly traditions. The teaching of *Nahwu* was not peripheral but central to religious instruction, enabling students to interpret foundational Islamic texts, including the Qur'an, both grammatically and contextually. This underscores the epistemological significance of *Nahwu* as an essential tool for textual hermeneutics within traditional Islamic education.

Theoretically, this research contributes to a growing body of literature that repositions Southeast Asian Islamic educational institutions as active agents in the global Islamic intellectual tradition. By documenting the structured tiered system of *Nahwu* instruction—ranging from elementary to advanced texts—and highlighting the localized implementation of classical methods such as *sorogan* with vernacular translations (*baramulo*), the study introduces a nuanced perspective on pedagogical adaptation and curriculum development in indigenous Islamic settings. These insights challenge the prevailing narrative of passive knowledge reception and affirm the intellectual agency of local Muslim scholars in shaping Islamic literacy.

Nevertheless, the study is not without limitations. The data were drawn from a limited sample of *surau* and extant manuscripts, restricting the generalizability of the findings across the wider Minangkabau region. Furthermore, sociocultural variables such as gender dynamics, age distribution, and teacher-student relations within the *surau* context were not explored in depth. Future research involving broader geographical coverage and

interdisciplinary methodologies—combining philology, anthropology, and Islamic pedagogy—would be essential to further contextualize and expand upon these findings.

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