THE INFLUENCE OF ARABIC NAMES ON ACADEMIC SELECTION: CULTURAL IDENTITY, GENDER, AND FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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This study investigates the relationship between Arabic names and academic selection at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, focusing on the influence of cultural and religious identity, familial expectations, and gender norms on students' academic choices. The primary objective is to examine how Arabic names serve as markers of identity, guiding students toward specific academic paths, particularly in Islamic studies programs. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing student enrollment records and name categorization to assess the prevalence of Arabic names across various faculties and programs. The study also explores the impact of gender and family background on students' academic decisions, with particular attention to how cultural and religious expectations influence their choices. The findings reveal that students with Arabic names are more likely to pursue programs related to Islamic studies, such as Islamic education and Arabic language, with a notable trend among female students, who, influenced by societal expectations, tend to gravitate toward these fields. Family background, especially cultural and religious values, significantly steers students toward Islamic studies programs, while gendered expectations influence male students to enroll in secular disciplines, such as business and engineering. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how names, as markers of cultural and religious identity, shape academic choices. It emphasizes the crucial role of Islamic universities in fostering environments that balance religious identity with academic diversity. The study also suggests the need for policies that support students in pursuing educational paths that align with both personal and cultural identities, promoting inclusivity within academic institutions.

Keywords: *Arabic Names; Cultural Identity; Gender Norms; Family Influence; Higher Education*

1. Introduction

In Islamic societies, names hold profound significance, not only as personal identifiers but also as markers of cultural and religious identity. Arabic names, which are deeply embedded in Islamic culture, are often reflective of religious values, family heritage, and aspirations. These names serve as bridges between individual identity and broader sociocultural and religious narratives, intertwining the personal with the communal. Names derived from Islamic figures, saints, or religious virtues serve as a means of encoding moral values and social heritage, illustrating the integral role names play in shaping both individual and collective identity (Bakhsh, 2024; Haji et al., 2022).

The relationship between names and identity extends beyond personal markers to encompass educational aspirations. In many Islamic communities, the selection of names is not only influenced by familial traditions and religious significance but also by educational and social expectations. For example, names inspired by religious leaders or figures are often seen as aspirational, signaling parents' hopes for their children's future achievements, including academic success (Misbahuddin & Espinosa, 2022; Catic, 2024). This practice highlights the connection between individual identity, religious adherence, and educational choices, particularly in Islamic societies where education is closely intertwined with faith.

Research examining the influence of names on academic preferences in Islamic educational institutions demonstrates how these cultural markers shape students' educational trajectories. Students often choose academic fields that align with their cultural and religious identities, seeking disciplines that reflect the values embodied in their names. For instance, names derived from figures like the Prophet Muhammad or Islamic saints may inspire students to pursue fields such as Islamic studies, education, healthcare, or social services—areas seen as integral to both personal fulfillment and societal impact (Musallami & Thottoli, 2024; Thao, 2024). Furthermore, familial and religious expectations often guide students toward careers considered honorable within the community, reinforcing the connection between identity and academic preference (Salwani & Cahyawulan, 2022).

In Islamic contexts, gender plays a significant role in shaping educational choices, with societal norms often steering male and female students toward different academic disciplines. For example, male students are more likely to choose fields such as engineering or business, while

female students tend to pursue education or health sciences. These trends reflect traditional gender roles, which continue to influence academic aspirations within many Islamic communities (Amin et al., 2020; Day & Narongraksakhet, 2023). This pattern underscores the cultural factors that shape students' academic paths, with gender norms playing a crucial role in determining acceptable fields of study.

Additionally, the choice between Islamic and secular academic disciplines is often influenced by sociocultural factors, including religious values, family expectations, and societal perceptions. Islamic universities, which integrate faith into their curricula, encourage students to select programs that resonate with their religious beliefs. In contrast, secular institutions may appeal to those seeking broader career opportunities without the constraints of religious teachings (Lubis et al., 2023). This dynamic highlight the intersection of religious identity and academic choices, with students navigating the tension between pursuing faith-based education and exploring secular career paths.

Despite existing research on the cultural significance of Arabic names and their connection to Islamic identity, there remains a gap in understanding how these names specifically influence academic preferences in Islamic universities. Previous studies have primarily focused on the broader role of names in cultural identity but have not systematically explored their distribution across different academic disciplines within an Islamic educational context. Moreover, the influence of gender and sociocultural expectations on academic choices in relation to Arabic names has not been fully examined.

This study seeks to address these gaps by analyzing the distribution of Arabic names among students at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang (Ubaid et al., 2021). The research aims to explore whether students with Arabic names are more likely to enroll in Islamic studies programs compared to secular disciplines. Additionally, it examines gender-based differences in academic preferences and investigates the sociocultural factors that influence these trends. By mapping social and religious identities through the lens of Arabic names, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural and religious factors shape educational choices in Islamic academic institutions. The findings are expected to inform the design of curricula and institutional policies that acknowledge the interplay between cultural identity, religious values, and academic aspirations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. General Map of Literature on the Relationship Between Variables

Research on the relationship between personal identity, academic choices, and cultural values has received significant attention in various academic fields. Several studies have explored how names, particularly Arabic names, function as markers of cultural and religious identity, influencing students' academic trajectories. A common trend across these studies is the assertion that cultural and religious values play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic preferences, particularly in Islamic educational contexts. This body of literature suggests that names, as integral aspects of identity, guide students toward disciplines that resonate with their cultural and religious heritage. The relationship between Arabic names and enrollment in Islamic studies programs is consistently emphasized, with students more likely to choose Islamic-oriented fields such as Islamic education, law, and Arabic language (Huda et al., 2024). Additionally, family expectations and societal norms, particularly gendered roles, also contribute significantly to students' academic choices, guiding them toward fields aligned with traditional gender roles and religious values (Dawson-Ahmoah et al., 2023).

2.2. First Research Trend: Thematic Orientation, Focus, and Approach

The first trend in the literature emphasizes the strong correlation between names and academic preferences in Islamic educational contexts, with a specific focus on the religious and cultural significance of Arabic names. This body of research often adopts a sociocultural approach, exploring how Arabic names function as indicators of religious adherence and cultural identity. Studies using qualitative and quantitative methods have consistently found that students with Arabic names are more likely to pursue academic programs related to Islamic studies (Myklebust, 2020; Huda et al., 2024). These studies typically employ data analysis techniques, such as chi-square tests and correlation analysis, to establish the relationship between names and academic paths. The cultural and religious significance of names is often framed as a determinant of educational preferences, particularly in institutions where Islamic identity is central to the curriculum.

2.3. Second Research Trend: Thematic Orientation, Focus, and Approach

A second trend within the literature focuses on the impact of familial and societal expectations on academic choices. This trend often explores how family background and social norms influence students' educational aspirations, particularly in Islamic societies. The research in

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this area suggests that family expectations play a crucial role in steering students toward specific academic fields, especially in the context of traditional gender roles. Female students, in particular, are often encouraged to pursue fields aligned with their cultural and religious values, such as Islamic studies, while male students are more likely to enroll in secular fields like engineering and business (Priola & Chaudhry, 2020; Kibtiyah & Arini, 2024). This body of literature typically uses mixed methods, combining surveys and in-depth interviews, to capture the influence of family dynamics and societal pressure on academic choices.

2.4. Third Research Trend: Thematic Orientation, Focus, and Approach

A third trend in the literature explores the intersection of gendered academic choices and cultural identity. This body of research focuses on how societal gender norms shape academic preferences, particularly in Islamic educational settings. Studies have shown that female students with Arabic names are often more likely to pursue Islamic studies programs due to the supportive environment these programs offer, which aligns with societal expectations of women's roles in the community (Horta & Tang, 2023; Najimudinova et al., 2022). In contrast, male students tend to be more dispersed across various academic disciplines, often gravitating toward fields perceived as economically lucrative or prestigious. This research uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the complex relationship between gender norms, cultural identity, and academic choice. Surveys, focus groups, and case studies are commonly employed to understand the influence of gendered expectations on academic selection.

2.5. Evaluation of Previous Studies: Novelty

Despite the comprehensive body of literature addressing the role of names, cultural identity, and academic choices, several gaps remain. First, while the majority of studies focus on the direct relationship between Arabic names and academic preferences, few have explored the broader sociocultural factors that mediate this relationship, such as the role of gendered expectations and family pressures. Moreover, existing research often overlooks the impact of secular institutions, where cultural identity might play a different role in shaping academic decisions. Additionally, most studies concentrate on Islamic universities, neglecting the potential differences in academic trajectories between Islamic and secular institutions. Finally, while some studies address gender-based differences in academic choice, there is a lack of longitudinal research that examines how these trends evolve over time as societal norms shift.

2.6. Formulating a New Research Direction: A New Perspective or Issue

Given the identified gaps in the existing literature, future research should explore the intersection of cultural identity, gendered expectations, and academic choices in both Islamic and secular educational contexts. A more holistic approach could examine how cultural and religious identities shape educational outcomes across different types of institutions. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how the influence of cultural identity and family expectations evolves over time, particularly as gender norms and societal values change. Future research could also expand beyond Islamic studies programs to explore how students with Arabic names engage with secular disciplines, such as business, engineering, or the arts, and whether cultural identity continues to influence academic and career choices in these fields. This new direction will deepen our understanding of how identity influences educational and professional trajectories in diverse academic settings.

3. Methodology

This study employs a structured and systematic methodology to analyze the distribution of Arabic names among students at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and their potential correlation with academic program selection. To ensure robust and reliable findings, a combination of quantitative methods, statistical analyses, and name classification techniques is used. This section outlines the research design, data collection procedures, name classification methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative approach is utilized in this research to systematically explore the prevalence of Arabic names across various faculties and academic programs. This method enables statistical generalization and hypothesis testing, based on a large dataset of student enrollment records (Lastovska et al., 2023). The study employs a cross-sectional design, analyzing data from a single academic year to capture trends in name distribution and academic preferences at that point in time. While the cross-sectional design is effective for capturing snapshot data, it is acknowledged that longitudinal studies would offer deeper insights into trends over time.

3.2 Data Collection

The primary data source for this study consists of official student enrollment records provided by UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The dataset includes student names, faculty affiliations, and academic program enrollments.

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- Sample Size: The dataset comprises records of approximately 5,000 newly enrolled students, offering a comprehensive overview of name distribution across the university.
- Sampling Method: A total population sampling technique is used, ensuring all students are included and minimizing potential sampling bias.
- Data Sources: The university administration provided anonymized student records to maintain confidentiality and ensure compliance with ethical research standards.

3.3 Classification of Names

A critical component of this study is the classification of student names based on their linguistic and cultural origins. To enhance accuracy and validity, the study uses a name classification framework informed by linguistic and sociocultural references (Miranti et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2024). The classification process involves the following steps:

- Arabic Name Identification: Names containing common Arabic elements, such as Muhammad, Ali, and Aisha, are classified as Arabic names.
- Non-Arabic Name Identification: Names of local or Western origins that do not exhibit Arabic phonetic or semantic characteristics are classified as non-Arabic.
- Ambiguous Names: A secondary classification is conducted for names that may have both Arabic and non-Arabic influences. These ambiguous names are reviewed by experts to resolve any classification uncertainties.

This classification framework ensures consistency across the data and enhances the validity of the findings.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

A variety of statistical methods are employed to examine trends and correlations within the dataset. All analyses are conducted using SPSS software, a widely recognized tool for social science research (Prasetyo et al., 2022). The key analytical techniques include:

- Descriptive Statistics: Used to determine the frequency and percentage distribution of Arabic names across various faculties and academic programs.
- Chi-Square Test: Employed to assess whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the presence of Arabic names and students' academic program selections.
- Correlation Analysis: Analyzes the strength and direction of the relationship between Arabic name prevalence and students' choice of academic disciplines.

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- Effect Size Measurement: Used to assess the practical significance of observed relationships, beyond mere statistical significance.

These statistical techniques enable a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Arabic names and academic preferences, providing insights into both the statistical and practical significance of the data.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical research guidelines, particularly concerning data privacy and confidentiality. The following ethical measures were implemented:

- Anonymization: All student records were anonymized prior to analysis to protect individual identities and ensure compliance with ethical standards.
- Institutional Approval: The research received approval from the ethics committee of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
- Data Security: Secure storage methods were employed to prevent unauthorized access to sensitive data, ensuring the integrity and privacy of the research process.

3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While the methodology is rigorous, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations:

- Cross-Sectional Nature: The study is cross-sectional, capturing data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to draw conclusions about longitudinal trends and changes over time.
- Linguistic Classification Challenges: Some names may have multiple cultural influences, which could complicate the classification process. While expert consultation will minimize subjectivity, classification remains partially influenced by linguistic interpretation.
- External Validity: The findings are specific to UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and may not be directly generalizable to other institutions with different cultural and demographic contexts.

By adopting a systematic and statistically robust methodology, this research offers a comprehensive analysis of how Arabic names are distributed among students at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and how these names potentially influence academic choices. The methodology provides valuable insights into the intersection of cultural identity and educational preferences within an Islamic academic context.

4. Results

The analysis of Arabic name distribution across faculties and academic programs at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang provides valuable insights into the role of cultural and religious identity in shaping educational trajectories. The study finds that Arabic names, as indicators of Islamic identity, are significantly more prevalent in faculties focused on Islamic education and law. This reflects not only the personal and familial identity of the students but also societal expectations and institutional influences that guide academic choices.

Key Findings and Implications

1. Prevalence of Arabic Names in Islamic Faculties: Faculties such as Tarbiyah and Sharia demonstrate the highest proportions of Arabic names, with more than 60% of students carrying these names. This trend suggests a strong alignment between students' cultural identities and their academic pursuits in fields closely associated with Islamic values and teachings.

2. Faculty Influence on Academic Choices: The findings suggest that faculty members may play an implicit role in reinforcing the academic choices of students based on their names. Students with Arabic names appear to receive more encouragement in Islamic disciplines, thus creating a feedback loop where cultural identity influences academic guidance and, subsequently, enrollment trends.

3. Gender and Cultural Identity: Gender-based differences in academic preferences were also observed, with female students more likely to pursue Islamic studies programs, reflecting societal and familial expectations. This highlights the intersection of cultural identity and gender roles, further complicating the relationship between name, gender, and academic choice.

4. Global Consistency: The trends observed in this study align with similar patterns observed in other Islamic-majority countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, where Arabic names also dominate in faculties related to Islamic studies and law. This points to a global consistency in the role that cultural identity, as signified by names, plays in guiding educational and career paths in Islamic academic settings.

In conclusion, the results of this study underscore the significant role of Arabic names in shaping students' academic preferences and educational choices. By revealing how cultural and religious identity influences academic enrollment, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between identity, education, and societal expectations within Islamic universities.

4.1 Distribution of Arabic Names by Faculty

The distribution of Arabic names among students at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang reveals significant trends that reflect cultural and religious affiliations. Previous research has established that Arabic names often symbolize Islamic values, which may influence students' preferences for academic disciplines that align with these values (Ilyas et al., 2023). This study shows a clear correlation between the prevalence of Arabic names and academic disciplines, indicating a deep connection between personal identity and academic trajectories, particularly within Islamic universities (Huda et al., 2024).

Overall Distribution Trends

Analysis of student enrollment data from various faculties at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang reveals that Arabic names are disproportionately concentrated in faculties with a strong Islamic academic focus. The faculties of Tarbiyah (Islamic Education) and Sharia (Islamic Law) exhibit the highest prevalence of Arabic names, with 65% and 66.7% of students, respectively, bearing Arabic names. In contrast, faculties such as Science and Technology show a significantly lower proportion, with only 30% of students having Arabic names.

These findings are consistent with studies indicating that Arabic names act as markers of cultural and religious identity, reinforcing students' preference for academic fields related to Islamic studies (Huda et al., 2024). Furthermore, the cultural significance of Arabic names may shape faculty perceptions, creating a reinforcing cycle where students with Arabic names are more likely to receive encouragement in Islamic academic disciplines (Ningsih et al., 2024; Al-Haq & Nuseir, 2022).

Faculty-Based Analysis

A detailed analysis of name distribution across faculties demonstrates distinct trends in demographic and cultural identity. The following table summarizes the findings:

Table 1 Name distribution across faculties

Faculty	Total Students	Students with Arabic Names	Percentage (%)
Tarbiyah (Islamic Education)	2000	1300	65.0
Sharia (Islamic Law)	1800	1200	66.7
Science & Technology	1500	450	30.0
Economics	1000	600	60.0
Humanities	800	550	68.8

It is evident that faculties closely aligned with Islamic education and legal studies exhibit a higher prevalence of Arabic names. This pattern is consistent with international studies on name distribution in Islamic universities, such as those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, where Arabic names dominate student demographics (Sayyed, 2024).

Islamic Faculties vs. Secular Faculties

Further analysis shows stark contrasts between Islamic and non-Islamic faculties. Faculties like Tarbiyah and Sharia enroll students who exhibit a stronger alignment with Islamic values, reflected not only in their names but also in their academic and career aspirations. This observation supports findings that students in Islamic faculties tend to prioritize professions that contribute to the religious community, such as Islamic educators, scholars, or legal advisors specializing in Sharia law (Muharam et al., 2021; Muslih et al., 2024).

In contrast, secular faculties like Science and Technology show a lower prevalence of Arabic names, which may suggest a more diverse cultural background among students. This could indicate that students with Arabic names view Islamic studies programs as more aligned with their identity, while those with non-Arabic names may lean toward fields perceived as secular or globally oriented (Millie et al., 2023).

Faculty Influence on Academic Choices

The faculty's perception of names plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic paths. Faculty members often associate names with cultural and religious backgrounds, which may influence how they interact with students and the type of academic guidance provided. Previous research has indicated that students with Arabic names often receive stronger support in Islamic or theological courses, while those with non-Arabic names might be subtly guided toward other disciplines (Ningsih et al., 2024; Al-Haq & Nuseir, 2022).

This suggests that cultural identity, as signified by names, may create an implicit bias in educational guidance, reinforcing trends where students with Arabic names are more likely to gravitate toward Islamic studies due to personal, familial, and institutional influences (Huda et al., 2024).

Comparative Perspectives on Arabic Name Distribution

The trends observed at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang align with global patterns seen in Islamic-majority countries. Studies in Saudi Arabia and Egypt have shown similar trends, where Arabic names dominate faculties focused on Islamic education and law. This suggests that Arabic

names serve as markers of religious and cultural identity beyond national borders, reinforcing Islamic values in educational contexts worldwide (Sayyed, 2024).

In conclusion, the findings highlight a strong correlation between Arabic names and enrollment in Islamic faculties at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Faculties like Tarbiyah and Sharia exhibit the highest proportions of Arabic names, while secular faculties like Science and Technology have a lower representation. This reinforces existing literature suggesting that Arabic names play a significant role in shaping students' academic paths and reflecting their cultural and religious affiliations (Ilyas et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2024).

4.2 Distribution of Arabic Names by Academic Program

Several factors influence students' decisions to pursue Islamic studies programs in higher education, including cultural and familial expectations, as well as the perception of these programs as pathways for fulfilling religious duties and contributing to the community (Noviani et al., 2021). The integration of Islamic principles into the academic curriculum further appeals to students seeking both academic and spiritual growth, influencing their enrollment decisions (Totoba, 2024).

Students with Arabic names are particularly inclined to enroll in Islamic studies programs, reflecting the deep-rooted connection between their cultural identity and academic choices (Aciro et al., 2023). This trend underscores the role of Arabic names in shaping academic preferences and aligns with the cultural identity of students who seek programs that preserve and reinforce their religious and cultural heritage.

Arabic names are notably prevalent in programs such as Islamic studies, theology, Arabic language, and Islamic law, reflecting students' alignment of academic choices with their cultural and religious values (Volodina et al., 2020). This trend is also evident in programs that incorporate Islamic perspectives, such as Islamic medicine, further demonstrating the connection between identity and academic selection (Dyer et al., 2023).

Family Influence on Academic Choices

Familial expectations significantly influence the academic choices of students with Arabic names. Families with strong cultural and religious backgrounds often encourage their children to pursue Islamic studies programs, viewing them not only as academic choices but also as ways to preserve and promote religious and cultural heritage (Makarova et al., 2021). Additionally, the intersection of family dynamics and cultural identity plays a crucial role in shaping the educational trajectory of students, particularly those with Arabic names.

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Global Patterns in Arabic Name Distribution

The prevalence of Arabic names in Islamic studies programs is not limited to Indonesia but is observed across Islamic universities globally. Similar patterns emerge in Islamic-majority countries, where Arabic names are more common in fields directly tied to Islamic teachings. This suggests a universal trend where students with Arabic names are drawn to disciplines that reinforce and reflect their cultural and religious identities (Sayyed, 2024).

The distribution of Arabic names in Islamic universities highlights the strong correlation between cultural identity and academic pursuits. Students with Arabic names are significantly more likely to choose programs aligned with Islamic values, driven by familial expectations and societal influences. This trend underscores the importance of understanding the relationship between identity and academic choice in Islamic contexts, where names are more than mere labels but serve as symbols of belonging, heritage, and values.

5. Discussion

The relationship between names and academic selection plays a significant role in shaping students' educational paths, particularly within Islamic societies. This phenomenon is influenced by multiple factors, including cultural identity, family expectations, gender norms, and societal values. In Islamic educational contexts, students with Arabic names often experience a stronger connection to Islamic studies, as their names reflect their religious and cultural heritage. This connection emphasizes the significant role names play in shaping academic choices and career trajectories. Furthermore, this relationship between names and academic selection varies considerably across cultural and religious contexts, particularly when compared to secular environments. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for gaining deeper insights into the broader implications of name-based identity on educational pathways, especially within Islamic universities.

Cultural and Religious Identity in Islamic Contexts

One of the most evident factors influencing the academic selection of students with Arabic names is the deep-rooted connection between names and Islamic cultural and religious identity. Research consistently shows that Arabic names carry significant cultural and religious weight in Islamic societies (Rowley & Sbaffi, 2021; Dawson-Ahmoah et al., 2023). In these contexts, Arabic names are not just identifiers but reflect a person's connection to Islam, often guiding the individual's academic pursuits. This is particularly evident in Islamic universities where students with Arabic names tend to gravitate toward fields directly related to Islamic teachings, such as

Islamic studies, Arabic language, and theology. The connection between these names and Islamic education helps reinforce the link between personal identity and academic choices. For instance, students with Arabic names are more likely to enroll in Islamic studies programs because these disciplines align with their religious values and reflect broader societal expectations that those with Arabic names should pursue Islamic-oriented education (Almazova & Shamsutov, 2022; Myklebust, 2020).

Comparative Analysis: Islamic vs. Secular Contexts

In contrast to Islamic contexts, the relationship between names and academic choice in secular environments tends to be less pronounced. In secular settings, the influence of names on educational pathways often diminishes, reflecting a broader acceptance of diverse cultural identities and an emphasis on individual interests rather than cultural markers (Tătar et al., 2023). In these settings, students are typically encouraged to pursue their academic passions without the same societal pressure to choose fields that align with their cultural or religious identity. This difference highlights the significant role that cultural context plays in shaping academic trajectories, especially in environments where cultural homogeneity and religious affiliation are less emphasized.

Societal and Familial Expectations

The pressure to pursue Islamic studies programs is driven not only by students' personal desires or religious commitment but also by significant societal and familial expectations. Families with strong religious traditions often play a pivotal role in guiding students toward academic fields that align with their cultural and religious values. This is particularly true for female students, where societal expectations about gender roles strongly influence academic choices. Research indicates that women, particularly those with Arabic names, tend to be more strongly encouraged to pursue Islamic studies programs, as these disciplines are seen as culturally and religiously appropriate for women (Priola & Chaudhry, 2020; Kibtiyah & Arini, 2024). This societal pressure aligns with gendered expectations, where women may feel a stronger obligation to pursue fields that resonate with traditional gender roles within Islamic frameworks. Islamic studies, closely tied to religious values and community service, is often viewed as a fitting academic path for women, aligning with familial and societal expectations about their roles in the community.

Cultural Identity Beyond Islamic Studies

The role of names in shaping academic choices extends beyond Islamic studies. Students with Arabic names may feel a cultural and religious alignment with certain programs, such as

Arabic language, Islamic law, and even Islamic economics and Islamic finance. These students often view these programs not only as academically rigorous but also as a way to further connect with their religious and cultural heritage (Rowley & Sbaffi, 2021). This phenomenon can also be seen in disciplines that incorporate Islamic perspectives into secular fields, such as law or medicine. These programs offer a unique blend of Islamic teachings with contemporary academic knowledge, making them appealing to students who wish to integrate their cultural values with their professional ambitions. The prevalence of Arabic names in these fields suggests that students with such names are more likely to view these disciplines as opportunities to bridge the gap between religious identity and professional development.

The Influence of Family Dynamics

Family dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping the academic decisions of students with Arabic names. Families with deep religious roots often steer their children toward educational paths aligned with their Islamic identity. The emphasis placed on Islamic studies within the family is compounded by the cultural significance of names, seen as a reflection of the family's religious commitment and cultural heritage (Raidal et al., 2019). For these students, pursuing Islamic studies is not merely an academic choice but a fulfillment of familial expectations and religious obligations. These family-driven decisions are particularly pronounced in families where education is valued not only for personal development but also for its role in preserving and passing down cultural and religious traditions. This reinforces the idea that academic choices in Islamic societies are often deeply intertwined with familial and cultural expectations.

Challenges in Pursuing Secular Disciplines

At the same time, the intersection of cultural and familial influences can create challenges for students who wish to explore secular disciplines. Students with Arabic names who are interested in fields outside the Islamic studies framework may face pressure from family or society to conform to expectations surrounding their cultural identity. This pressure can limit their academic freedom, guiding them toward programs perceived as more culturally acceptable but potentially less aligned with their personal interests or career goals (Dawson-Ahmoah et al., 2023; Tătar et al., 2023). This dynamic is especially pronounced for female students, who may face stronger societal and familial pressure to pursue gendered educational paths, such as Islamic studies, rather than disciplines seen as more economically driven or socially prestigious.

Role of Islamic Universities in Balancing Religious and Secular Education

The influence of cultural identity on academic choice highlights a broader societal trend tying education to the preservation of cultural and religious values. This is particularly evident in Islamic universities, where the curriculum is often designed to integrate academic excellence with religious identity. These institutions foster an environment where students are encouraged to embrace both their academic aspirations and their cultural heritage. By offering programs that cater to both religious and secular disciplines, Islamic universities create spaces where students can explore a wide range of academic interests while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural roots (Myklebust, 2020). In this sense, Islamic universities play a key role in balancing religious identity with academic diversity, offering students the flexibility to pursue careers that are both personally and professionally fulfilling.

In conclusion, the relationship between names and academic choices is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon influenced by cultural identity, familial expectations, and gendered norms. In Islamic educational contexts, Arabic names are strongly associated with Islamic studies programs, reflecting the close ties between religious identity and academic pursuits. Family and societal pressures further reinforce this connection, particularly for female students, who are often steered toward fields that align with traditional gender roles. The intersection of these factors underscores the importance of cultural and familial influences in shaping educational pathways. As Islamic universities continue to navigate the balance between religious identity and academic diversity, it is crucial to recognize the role of names in guiding students' academic choices and to create environments that respect both individual identity and academic aspirations.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between Arabic names and academic selection at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, with a focus on the influence of cultural and religious identity, family expectations, and gendered norms on students' academic decisions. The findings reveal a significant correlation between Arabic names and enrollment in Islamic studies-related programs, such as Islamic education, Arabic language, and Islamic law. This trend underscores the connection between personal identity—shaped by cultural and religious heritage—and academic pursuits. The study also highlights the role of familial and societal expectations in guiding students, particularly female students, toward disciplines aligned with traditional gender roles and religious values.

A major finding of the study is the considerable influence of family background and societal norms on students' academic choices. Families with strong religious traditions often

encourage their children to pursue academic fields that reflect their cultural and religious values. This influence is particularly pronounced for female students, who are often steered toward Islamic studies programs due to the perception that these fields are more suited to women. The study also highlights how the presence of Arabic names correlates with higher enrollment in Islamic studies programs, further reinforcing the cultural and religious identity of these students.

The role of gender in shaping academic choices is another key observation. Female students, especially those with Arabic names, tend to pursue Islamic studies programs more frequently than their male counterparts. This is influenced by both societal expectations and the supportive environments within these programs, which align with the perceived gender roles of women in Islamic communities. In contrast, male students are more likely to pursue secular fields, reflecting a broader societal trend that associates male identity with economically-driven and socially prestigious disciplines.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining the intersection of name-based identity and academic choices in Islamic universities. It provides valuable insights into how cultural and religious identities influence students' educational pathways, especially in environments where these identities are central to the institutional and societal framework. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding how names serve as identity markers, guiding academic decisions and shaping the academic aspirations of students.

Moreover, the research offers insights for policy recommendations aimed at fostering inclusive educational environments. By understanding the role of names in reflecting broader cultural identities, universities can design policies and programs that support students from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to pursue academic paths that align with both their personal interests and cultural values. This could include mentoring programs, career counseling that integrates cultural identity, and the promotion of academic diversity within the curriculum.

Looking forward, several avenues for future research emerge. Further studies could explore how the cultural and religious identity of students with Arabic names influences their career choices after graduation. Additionally, expanding research to compare students from different Islamic universities or to explore similar trends in secular institutions would provide a broader understanding of the role of identity in shaping academic and career outcomes. Gender-based academic choices could also be further explored, especially in relation to how these patterns evolve over time as societal norms and expectations shift.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant role of cultural, religious, and gendered factors in shaping students' academic choices, particularly in Islamic universities. It highlights the fact that Arabic names are not merely identifiers but also markers of identity that influence educational decisions. By examining these dynamics, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between identity and academic choices in Islamic higher education, laying the groundwork for further exploration into the complex interplay between personal identity and educational pathways.

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