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Teaching Arabic Today: Challenges, Strategies, and Opportunities in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract. The teaching of Arabic in Indonesia has presented persistent difficulties shaped by linguistic, cultural, and institutional conditions. Despite its importance as both a global and religious language, Arabic instruction in the country is often constrained by outdated curricula, a heavy reliance on grammar-translation methods, and the gap between classroom use of Modern Standard Arabic and the colloquial varieties students encounter through media. While previous studies have examined Arabic education broadly, few have centered teachers' voices in exploring these challenges, particularly within the Indonesian context. Moreover, limited attention has been given to pedagogical innovations such as translanguaging and digital integration. This study addressed these gaps through semi-structured interviews with 20 Arabic teachers working across primary, secondary, and higher education institutions in different regions of Indonesia. Data was analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns of challenges, practices, and emerging opportunities. The findings reveal enduring problems, including low student motivation, limited use of intercultural materials, and weak institutional support. Teachers responded with adaptive strategies such as translanguaging, the creative use of digital tools, and the development of locally relevant learning resources, which together open new possibilities for enhancing students' communicative competence. The results underscore the need for curriculum renewal, sustained investment in teacher training, and more flexible policy support to make Arabic education responsive to contemporary linguistic and cultural realities. By foregrounding teachers' perspectives, this study contributes a context-sensitive account of Arabic pedagogy in Indonesia, advancing wider discussions on multilingual education and pedagogical innovation in non-Arabic-speaking contexts.

Keywords: Arabic language education; teaching strategies; educational opportunities; pedagogical challenges; Indonesian higher education

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1. Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected educational landscape, teaching Arabic serves as a powerful pedagogical pathway for fostering cross-cultural understanding and developing students' global competencies (Wang et al., 2025). As schools and universities worldwide strive to promote intercultural literacy and multilingual awareness, Arabic language education offers immense, yet often underutilized, potential for broadening students' worldviews and challenging persistent stereotypes about the Arab world (Rehman et al., 2025). Arabic, with its rich linguistic heritage, historical significance, and cultural depth, provides unique insights into Arab identity, philosophical thought, and civilizational narratives that remain largely absent from mainstream curricula in many non-Arab contexts.

This absence reveals a critical gap in global education, particularly given the position of Arabic as one of the world's major languages, both in terms of the number of speakers and its significance in religious, political, and cultural domains (Wang et al., 2025). Teaching Arabic effectively, however, involves more than just language transmission; it requires what Kotze (2025) referred to as a culturally embedded and pedagogically responsive approach that aligns linguistic instruction with learners' social, cultural, and cognitive contexts.

The pedagogical challenges of incorporating Arabic into educational settings are multifaceted, spanning linguistic, cultural, and curricular dimensions (Alavi Nia, 2025). At the linguistic level, the unique grammatical structure of Arabic as a Semitic language (Al-Sharif & Al-Abbas, 2025), along with its complex morphology and rich use of metaphor (Almohammadi et al., 2025), can pose significant challenges for both learners and educators. Arabic frequently employs rhetorical strategies such as paronomasia, intertextuality, and semantic layering (Abdulgumhni, 2025), which demand advanced cognitive and cultural decoding, especially for learners unfamiliar with Arab or Islamic traditions. These pedagogical difficulties are compounded by the scarcity of culturally sensitive teaching materials and the shortage of educators who possess both high-level Arabic proficiency and pedagogical training (Taibi, 2024).

Moreover, institutional factors such as curriculum design often reflect Eurocentric language priorities, leading to what Mayer (2025) described as the marginalization of Arabic within global language education frameworks. This marginalization is especially evident in school systems where Arabic is treated as peripheral or elective rather than as a core language of global relevance. The lack of comprehensive teacher training programs, particularly in Arab countries, further exacerbates what Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017) referred to as a structural gap in the Arabic language education ecosystem, one that limits the integration of Arabic into diverse educational contexts worldwide.

Structural and institutional barriers continue to complicate the integration of Arabic language instruction into global education systems, with significant implications for cultural equity and linguistic inclusion. In many regions, Arabic remains marginalized within school curricula due to policy decisions and market-

driven assumptions about its perceived limited relevance or utility (Mayer, 2025). This results in what can be termed a “pedagogical marginalization” of Arabic, where the language, despite its global significance, is excluded from mainstream educational frameworks or treated as peripheral. The underrepresentation of Arabic in formal education persists even in the face of efforts by academic institutions, international organizations, and advocacy groups promoting multilingual education and cultural diversity. As Hermans (2009) emphasized, such exclusion is not merely a curricular oversight but reflects broader political and ideological dynamics in education, where decisions about which languages are taught, and how, can reinforce dominant cultural narratives while silencing others.

Digital technologies and online platforms offer promising avenues to overcome these structural barriers by making Arabic instruction more accessible, flexible, and culturally contextualized. Platforms for digital learning, open educational resources (OERs), and interactive language applications are beginning to challenge traditional hierarchies in language education and reduce dependency on state-sanctioned or market-led publishing priorities (Kotze, 2025; Spjeldnæs, 2022). These technologies enable more direct and diverse connections between Arabic educators and learners, allowing for greater inclusion of authentic materials, dialectal variation, and culturally relevant pedagogy. However, as Ostern et al. (2021) argued, educational research has yet to fully address the transformative potential of digital tools for Arabic language teaching. Current scholarship remains limited in its analysis of how technological, institutional, and linguistic factors intersect to shape the experiences of Arabic language learners and educators.

Although Arabic teaching in Indonesia continues to face obstacles, recent literacy movements and the wider reach of digital media are beginning to create new possibilities for rethinking its role in education. Still, several gaps remain unexamined. On a conceptual level, there is little discussion of how Arabic instruction might connect with digital literacy and intercultural awareness. From an empirical standpoint, studies rarely capture teachers’ day-to-day efforts to adjust their methods to technological change. On the practical side, there is a shortage of guidance for schools and universities on how to redesign curricula or support teacher development in ways that reflect both linguistic and cultural priorities. These shortcomings mirror real conditions in the classroom, where outdated syllabi, limited digital access, and sociopolitical pressures often shape which forms of Arabic are promoted and which are sidelined (Alkharashi, 2025).

The present study takes up these issues by examining the teaching strategies, digital practices, and institutional settings that shape Arabic learning in Indonesian higher education. It also draws on the work of Ziajka Stanton (2021), who stressed the need for culturally responsive approaches to language teaching. In this way, the study speaks to wider concerns in education and policy, especially in countering stereotypes and cultural distortions surrounding Arab societies, as noted by Rehman et al. (2025).

This study aims to provide a nuanced, practice-oriented examination of Arabic language teaching in educational contexts by drawing directly from the insights and experiences of Arabic language teachers. Through in-depth interviews with educators across different educational levels and institutional settings, the study seeks to understand how Arabic is taught, what challenges teachers encounter, and what opportunities they perceive in a rapidly evolving global education landscape.

For language educators and curriculum developers, the study builds on Byram's (2021) framework of intercultural competence to identify pedagogical strategies that foster both linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. For scholars and policymakers in the field of language education, it contributes to ongoing conversations about multilingual inclusion, cultural representation, and equitable access to global languages, especially in non-Arabic-speaking regions. To explore the practice-oriented landscape of Arabic language teaching in educational contexts, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What challenges do Arabic language teachers encounter in their teaching practice?
2. In what ways do digital platforms and OERs create opportunities for Arabic language education in Indonesia?
3. What pedagogical strategies are employed by teachers to promote both language proficiency and intercultural competence in Arabic language education?
4. How do Arabic language teachers in Indonesia perceive and respond to curriculum policies related to Arabic teaching, particularly in Islamic education settings?

By addressing these questions through in-depth interviews with educators, the study seeks to center teacher perspectives while contributing to pedagogical practice, curriculum development, and language education policy related to Arabic.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design (Bevan, 2014; Lim, 2025) to explore the pedagogical experiences, challenges, and opportunities encountered by Arabic language teachers in various educational contexts. Given the study's objective to examine how Arabic is taught, what barriers educators face, and what strategies they deploy in response to global shifts in education (Sukirman, 2022), a qualitative approach was particularly appropriate (Lim, 2025). Qualitative inquiry allowed for a nuanced, in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024), which are often shaped by sociocultural, institutional, and linguistic dynamics that could not be fully captured through quantitative measures.

Through in-depth interviews (Lim, 2025) with teachers across educational levels and institutional types, the research aimed to generate rich, descriptive insights that informed both classroom practice and broader language policy discourse. This design aligned with the interpretivist paradigm (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020), which recognizes the value of subjective meanings and contextual factors in

shaping human behavior and understanding (Aguzzoli et al., 2024). Moreover, this approach is anchored in the belief that teachers are not merely implementers of curricula but active agents whose voices are critical to understanding the realities of language education on the ground.

The primary data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews (Lim, 2025). Semi-structured interviews allowed for the exploration of specific themes, such as instructional challenges, intercultural dimensions of language teaching, digital integration, and policy constraints, while also giving participants the flexibility to elaborate on experiences that may not have been anticipated by the researcher. Interviews were guided by an interview protocol developed from both the literature on Arabic language pedagogy and the theoretical framework of intercultural competence (Byram, 2021).

The questions were open-ended (Sukirman & Kabilan, 2023), encouraging participants to reflect on their teaching philosophies, curriculum experiences, classroom strategies, institutional support, and perceptions of student engagement and outcomes. Follow-up prompts were used to probe deeper into particular issues as they arose, ensuring that both anticipated and emergent themes were thoroughly explored. The interviews were conducted either face to face or via online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet, depending on participant availability and location. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent for accurate transcription and analysis.

Participants in the study were selected through purposive sampling (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024), a strategy that enabled the researcher to identify and recruit individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Specifically, participants were Arabic language teachers who were actively teaching or had recently taught in formal educational settings, including primary schools, secondary schools, higher education institutions, and Islamic education centers. Managing data across such diverse educational contexts presented a formidable challenge; therefore, the study employed a comparative multiple case study design to ensure systematic collection and analysis across these varied settings.

To capture a broad spectrum of perspectives, participants were drawn from different teaching levels, institutional types (public, private, religious, and international), and geographic locations. Eligibility criteria required participants to have at least two years of experience in teaching Arabic and to be involved in curriculum implementation or instructional design. In total, 20 participants were interviewed, with data collection continuing until saturation was reached, that is, when no new insights or themes emerged. This sample size is consistent with qualitative research standards, which emphasize depth over breadth and seek to provide a rich and contextualized account of participants' experiences rather than generalizability (Braun & Clarke, 2025).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2025). This involved first becoming familiar with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts, followed by generating initial codes that captured meaningful units of information. The third phase involved identifying and grouping these codes into broader themes, which were then reviewed, refined, and defined in the subsequent stages. The final phase entailed synthesizing the findings into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions and aligned with the theoretical framework.

Thematic analysis is particularly suited for studies that seek to interpret patterns within qualitative data while maintaining a close connection to participants' own words and meanings. Both inductive and deductive approaches were applied during the analysis: inductive to allow for unexpected insights to emerge from the data, and deductive to ensure alignment with Byram's (2021) framework of intercultural communicative competence and broader educational concerns, such as multilingual inclusion and digital pedagogies.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed, following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. Credibility was established through member-checking, where selected participants were invited to review summaries of their interview transcripts or interpretations of their responses for accuracy and resonance. Data triangulation was also applied by verifying interview transcripts with the interviewees themselves and by systematically comparing and contrasting participants' accounts to identify both converging patterns and divergent perspectives.

This process enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings for practical application. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through the researcher's reflective journal and audit trail, documenting the research decisions, coding processes, and analytical reflections. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the research context, participant backgrounds, and institutional settings, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, peer debriefing with fellow researchers or academic supervisors was conducted throughout the data collection and analysis phases to minimize personal bias and improve analytical rigor.

Furthermore, ethical considerations were integral to the study's design and implementation. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was sought from the relevant institutional review board. All participants received detailed information sheets outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained in writing (or verbally in online contexts), and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Pseudonyms were used in all reports, and identifying details were removed from the transcripts. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from study at any time without penalty. Data were stored securely in password-protected digital files, and only the researchers and authorized academic advisors had access to the raw data.

In summary, this study was methodologically designed to foreground the voices of Arabic language teachers in diverse educational contexts, providing an in-depth and practice-oriented understanding of how Arabic was taught in a globalized world. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research sought to reveal the complex interplay of pedagogy, culture, policy, and technology in shaping the experiences of Arabic educators. The findings were expected to inform both classroom practice and wider policy discussions concerning language education, intercultural competence, and curriculum reform, particularly in non-Arabic-speaking or under-resourced regions.

3. Findings

3.1 Linguistic and Cultural Challenges, and How They Are Addressed

Data analysis revealed that the most commonly cited linguistic challenge was the discrepancy between *Fusha* (Modern Standard Arabic) taught in classrooms and *'Amiyah* (regional dialects) commonly encountered through media and online content. This discrepancy often confused students, particularly when they consumed Arabic content on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram. A senior Arabic teacher at a Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior high school) shared:

"Students ask, 'Why is the Arabic on TikTok different from what we learn in class?' They get confused because we focus on Fusha, but they're exposed to 'Amiyah on social media."

This confusion sometimes led to reduced motivation, as students perceived classroom Arabic as outdated or disconnected from "real-life Arabic" spoken by native speakers. In terms of culture, the participants noted that textbooks often portrayed Arab culture in a narrow and stereotypical way, limited to classical Islamic practices or traditional Middle Eastern customs. These portrayals felt distant from the students' cultural backgrounds and interests. A lecturer from an Arabic education program at an Islamic university commented:

"Textbooks only show the classical Arab-Islamic culture. There's no mention of modern Arab society, youth culture, or pop media. That disconnect makes the learning experience less engaging."

To navigate these challenges, teachers employed a variety of adaptive strategies, including: 1) introducing informal dialectal forms in class discussions; 2) using Arabic songs, news clips, or social media excerpts as supplementary materials; and 3) encouraging comparative cultural discussions to raise awareness of Arabic diversity. A junior high school teacher in South Sulawesi reported:

"I showed students how greetings differ across Arab countries. We discussed the variations. This helped them understand Arabic is not monolithic – it's dynamic."

In response to the lack of engaging and contextually relevant resources, many teachers also created their own learning materials, often blending textbook content with authentic media:

"The textbooks are too formal and boring. I created worksheets with dialogues from YouTube and lyrics from Arabic pop songs. The students became much more engaged." (Madrasah teacher, Makassar)

3.2 Digital Innovation and Pedagogical Challenges in Arabic Language Education

Teachers across educational levels acknowledged that digital technologies offer vital opportunities for improving Arabic language instruction. Platforms such as Arabic YouTube channels, Al Jazeera Learning, and Madrasati were frequently mentioned as accessible sources of authentic input. One Islamic vocational high school teacher noted:

"I play short news stories or cartoons in Arabic. The students enjoy it and pick up vocabulary effortlessly."

Apps such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Duolingo were widely used to gamify grammar and vocabulary practice. However, several participants raised concerns that these apps lacked cultural context or real-world communicative functions needed for deeper linguistic development. An Islamic high school teacher in West Java remarked:

"Duolingo teaches only simple phrases. But students need listening and speaking practice in more natural settings."

Participants also reported that while OERs were abundant online, they were often designed for native speakers or learners in Arab countries, making them ill-suited for Indonesian learners, especially beginners:

"Online resources are great, but they're too formal or advanced for our students, who are just starting." (Lecturer, Arabic Department, UIN North Sumatra)

Some innovative teachers piloted global literacy initiatives, such as cross-cultural video exchanges or virtual projects with Arabic-speaking students. Although promising, such efforts remained limited due to infrastructural and institutional constraints. A teacher in Kalimantan described a cross-national project with students in Morocco:

"Our students made self-introduction videos in Arabic and exchanged them. It opened their minds to the diversity of Arabic pronunciation and expressions."

Despite these efforts, significant barriers remain, including: 1) unequal Internet access in remote areas; 2) lack of ICT training for Arabic teachers; and 3) institutional reluctance to invest in technology-integrated Arabic teaching. As a result, while digital tools and OERs hold substantial promise, their impact is still highly dependent on local capacity-building and supportive educational policies.

3.3 Pedagogical Strategies for Promoting Language Proficiency and Intercultural Competence

The interviews revealed that most participants recognized the importance of integrating intercultural competence into Arabic language instruction, especially in the era of globalization. However, they differed significantly in how they approached this goal. Some participants focused primarily on linguistic competence, while others made intentional efforts to embed cultural comparisons and global perspectives into their classroom practices. A university-level Arabic lecturer in Yogyakarta explained:

"Arabic is not only a language for reading the Qur'an or classical texts. I want my students to understand how Arabs live today, what they value, how they think. So, I ask them to compare Arab traditions with Indonesian Islamic practices."

At the secondary level, some participants promoted cultural awareness through task-based projects, such as 1) preparing digital presentations about Arab countries; 2) comparing Ramadan traditions between Indonesia and different Arab regions; and 3) creating bilingual dialogues on everyday life topics (e.g., market, family roles, fashion). A high school teacher in East Java noted:

"When students learn about food or family roles in Saudi Arabia or Egypt, they start to reflect on their own culture. It becomes a meaningful discussion."

In contrast, a few elementary-level teachers admitted that they focused mainly on vocabulary and memorization of religious phrases, citing a lack of age-appropriate materials and training in cultural pedagogy.

"For younger children, I just follow the textbook. We read, translate, and memorize. There's no time or material to talk about Arab culture."
(Madrasah Ibtidaiyah [Islamic elementary school] teacher, South Sulawesi)

Moreover, Islamic teachers at *pesantren* (boarding schools) often approached interculturality through a religious lens, emphasizing shared values (e.g., modesty, respect, hospitality) while acknowledging differences in practice.

"We don't teach students to imitate Arab culture, but to appreciate the values behind the expressions." (Pesantren Ustadz, West Nusa Tenggara)

These diverse strategies show that intercultural competence is not uniformly defined or practiced. It is shaped by the level of education, institutional identity, teacher preparation, and curricular flexibility.

3.4 Teachers' Perceptions of and Responses to Curriculum Policies in Arabic Language Education

Teachers' responses highlighted both alignment and disconnection between the national or institutional Arabic curriculum and actual classroom realities. Many expressed concern that the curriculum was outdated, heavily grammar-focused, and not sufficiently communicative or modern in its approach. A senior teacher at a public Madrasah Aliyah stated:

"The official curriculum is very academic and focuses too much on nahwu (syntax) and sharaf (morphology). Students want to speak Arabic, but we are bound by the textbook and exam structure."

Teachers in Islamic universities echoed similar frustrations, especially regarding the lack of integration with global and digital contexts:

"The curriculum doesn't reflect the real-world needs of students. They need Arabic for travel, online engagement, or work – but we're still teaching like it's the 1980s." (UIN Arabic lecturer, Makassar)

Nevertheless, many teachers demonstrated agency and creativity in responding to rigid curricula. Some adapted their teaching by: 1) supplementing with digital tools (videos, quizzes, apps); 2) prioritizing speaking and listening skills informally; and 3) designing local curriculum adaptations for extracurricular Arabic clubs. A Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high school) teacher in West Kalimantan explained:

"I follow the government curriculum for grades, but I also run an Arabic conversation club. That's where real learning happens."

Some pesantren-based teachers, meanwhile, expressed alignment with the traditional curriculum, finding it appropriate for preparing students to read classical Islamic texts. One of them stated:

"We use the same books our teachers used, Ajurumiyyah, Alfiyyah, etc. It's our heritage, and it works for our religious goals."

However, these teachers acknowledged that these materials do not suit all students, especially those not pursuing Islamic scholarship. Teachers consistently requested more autonomy, contextualized training, and updated curriculum models that recognize Arabic not only as a sacred language but also as a global, dynamic, and communicative language.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study offer a layered understanding of the realities faced by Arabic language teachers in Indonesia, particularly regarding the challenges they encounter and the strategies they develop in response. The first major theme that emerged is the linguistic challenge tied to student proficiency levels and the complex nature of Arabic itself. Teachers overwhelmingly noted that students enter Arabic language classrooms with minimal prior exposure to the language.

This is especially true in public schools, where Arabic is often introduced formally only in secondary education and is not used in students' daily lives. Even in Islamic educational settings, such as pesantren and madrasahs, where Arabic is seen as a religious language, the functional proficiency of students remains low, particularly in speaking and listening. Participating teachers described how students often memorize vocabulary or verses from the Qur'an without truly understanding their meanings or applying them in communicative contexts. This reflects a long-standing dominance of the grammar-translation method (Benati, 2018), where structural accuracy is prioritized over communicative competence, often leaving students linguistically passive (Corvo Sánchez, 2021).

Compounding the linguistic limitations is the issue of misalignment between instructional Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic) (Alanazi, 2024; Younes, 2014) and the Arabic that students are exposed to in media, online platforms, and informal settings. Several participants noted a growing disinterest among students who see Arabic as too academic or only for religious elites. This perception stems partly from the rigidity of curricula and textbooks, which largely neglect spoken varieties and contemporary Arabic usage. Participants explained that their students are increasingly drawn to dialectal Arabic found in TikTok videos, YouTube sermons, or Arabic dramas, which creates pedagogical tension between

standardized forms and colloquial expressions. While some teachers saw this as an opportunity to diversify instruction, others felt restricted by institutional policies that demand fidelity to national syllabi. This reveals a significant gap between top-down curriculum policies and classroom realities, suggesting the need for a more dynamic, context-sensitive curriculum design that better reflects students' linguistic ecologies and evolving learning needs (Soliman & Khalil, 2024).

Beyond the linguistic challenges, the study's second major theme centers on cultural and ideological representations of Arabic, which significantly influence how the language is taught and perceived. Arabic in Indonesia is heavily intertwined with religious identity, primarily Islam (Ilma & Rohmah, 2024; Sari & Moore, 2024), and is often positioned not as a language of worldly communication but as a sacred symbol of faith. While this cultural association has benefits, such as motivating learners through spiritual connection, it also narrows the scope of Arabic to purely religious domains.

Participants expressed concern that this limited framing reduces students' curiosity about the broader Arab world and inhibits the development of intercultural competence. This tension points to the absence of intercultural objectives in the national curriculum (Sukirman & Linse, 2024), which could otherwise empower students to critically engage with Arabic-speaking cultures while maintaining their own religious and cultural identities.

In response to these challenges, participants reported implementing a range of pedagogical adaptations and coping strategies. Many engaged in translanguaging practices, deliberately mixing Arabic, Indonesian, and English to scaffold meaning, negotiate understanding, and maintain student engagement. For instance, when students struggled with complex Arabic grammar, teachers would first explain the concept in Indonesian, provide comparative examples in English, and then return to Arabic exercises. This stepwise scaffolding allowed students to gradually internalize grammatical structures while reinforcing comprehension across languages. Teachers observed that this approach improved participation in class discussions, reduced confusion, and increased accuracy in written exercises, while also validating students' multilingual identities (Karataş et al., 2025).

Beyond language scaffolding, some participants adapted textbook content by embedding culturally familiar contexts, such as local traditions, foods, or festivals, into exercises and reading materials. This operationalization involved creating dialogues, story prompts, or task-based projects that connected Arabic vocabulary and grammar to students' everyday experiences. Participants reported that students became more motivated, actively contributed to discussions, and demonstrated deeper retention of new vocabulary. Together, these strategies demonstrate a practical integration of multilingual pedagogy and localized content, showing measurable impacts on both student engagement and learning outcomes, while aligning Arabic instruction with students' linguistic and cultural realities.

Another promising trend observed among participants is their use of digital tools and social media platforms to supplement and modernize instruction. In urban schools and tech-friendly pesantrens, participants used platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom to share supplementary videos, digital quizzes, and Arabic memes, especially during and after the pandemic. These tools allowed for extended learning beyond the classroom and fostered more interactive learning experiences.

However, the digital divide remains a major concern, particularly in remote or under-resourced regions. Participating teachers in rural areas cited unstable electricity, poor Internet connectivity, and lack of student access to smartphones as persistent barriers. Yet even in these challenging contexts, some participants demonstrated remarkable innovation, recording their own audio materials, using printed flashcards, or organizing student study circles to enhance peer learning. Importantly, teachers who had access to ongoing digital training and peer collaboration networks were better equipped to adopt and adapt these technologies effectively.

Finally, the findings of this study highlight broader policy and curriculum limitations that shape Arabic instruction across diverse school types (Nguyen & Barbieri, 2025). Participants expressed frustration with the lack of autonomy to modify content, particularly in government-run schools, where curricula are centralized and determined at national or provincial levels, with minimal input from classroom educators. They emphasized the need for responsive curriculum policies that balance religious content with secular, communicative uses of Arabic to meet students' evolving needs. A related concern was the limited availability of professional development, especially in areas such as intercultural pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and digital literacy. Participants reported feeling isolated and underprepared to implement innovative strategies effectively.

Moreover, the data suggests that while adaptive practices, such as translanguaging, localized content, and digital resource integration, can enhance engagement and learning outcomes, their sustainability is constrained by rigid curricula, exam-oriented assessments, and institutional expectations. Without systemic support, these innovations risk remaining sporadic or short-term. These findings underscore an urgent need for comprehensive investment in teacher capacity-building, curriculum renewal, and context-sensitive language policy reforms. Such reforms would empower educators as agents of change rather than mere implementers of top-down mandates, enabling sustainable innovation in Arabic education across Indonesia (Ihsan et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the current realities, challenges, and teacher-driven strategies in Arabic language education within the Indonesian context. Drawing insights from interviews with Arabic language teachers across multiple educational levels, the findings reveal that Arabic instruction is still predominantly framed within a religious paradigm, with many students perceiving it as a language primarily for religious rituals rather than as a

communicative tool. This narrow framing has implications for student motivation and engagement, as students often struggle to find relevance between the language and their everyday lives. Participating teachers consistently noted the mismatch between curriculum expectations and students' actual linguistic capabilities, particularly in terms of oral and written communication. The emphasis on grammar-translation methods and rote memorization, deeply rooted in traditional practices, continues to limit the potential for communicative competence and creative language use.

Despite these structural and pedagogical constraints, participants demonstrated notable agency and creativity in adapting their practices. Some embraced translanguaging strategies, drawing on students' first language to bridge comprehension gaps and build confidence in using Arabic. Others integrated digital media, audiovisual content, and locally relevant examples to make the learning process more engaging. However, these initiatives were often self-driven and lacked institutional support. Teachers had limited access to updated teaching materials, professional development, and autonomy to modify rigid, centralized syllabi. These conditions reveal systemic issues in the broader governance of Arabic language education in Indonesia, particularly in the lack of responsiveness to diverse learner needs and contextual realities across schools, madrasahs, and higher education institutions.

These findings suggest several important implications. There is an urgent need to reconceptualize Arabic as a living and dynamic language that serves not only religious purposes but also broader communicative, academic, and intercultural functions. A shift in this direction would require curriculum reform that emphasizes functional language use and aligns more closely with real-world Arabic, as used in media, diplomacy, and international Islamic scholarship. Furthermore, teachers need ongoing professional development opportunities that equip them with contemporary language teaching methodologies, digital pedagogical skills, and intercultural competencies. Empowering teachers in this way will not only enhance their confidence and instructional effectiveness but also support student learning in more meaningful ways.

While the study contributes important insights, it is not without limitations. It focused solely on teachers' perspectives and did not include student voices, which might have provided a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of classroom dynamics and learning experiences. The sample also did not capture the full diversity of Arabic instruction in pesantren or remote regions, which may have unique curricular practices or sociolinguistic conditions. Additionally, because the study is grounded in the Indonesian context, its findings may not be directly generalizable to other non-Arabic-speaking Muslim-majority countries, although similar challenges may exist.

Recommendations for curriculum reform and teacher professional development should be directly linked to the findings of the study. For instance, the persistence of grammar-translation methods appears to be influenced by assessment design; thus, exam policies should be reconsidered to emphasize communicative

competence alongside grammatical accuracy. Similarly, participants' reports of limited institutional support suggest that mechanisms such as professional learning communities, targeted government training programs, and mentoring networks could provide practical avenues to strengthen teacher capacity and promote sustainable pedagogical innovation.

Future research could build on these insights by conducting classroom ethnographies to observe how adaptive strategies such as translanguaging, localized content, and digital integration operate in practice. Comparative studies with other Southeast Asian countries could highlight contextual differences and shared challenges in Arabic language education. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the outcomes of curriculum reform and teacher professional development initiatives would help assess the sustainability and long-term impact of these interventions. Together, these measures and research directions would provide actionable guidance for policymakers and contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of Arabic pedagogy in Indonesia.

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