

The Transformation of Arabic Language Learning in the Digital Era: A Case Study of the Implementation of Responsive Curriculum in Indonesian Private Universities

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Abstract

This study examines curriculum innovation in Arabic language learning in private Islamic universities in Indonesia in response to the challenges of globalization, technological advancements, and changing job market needs. With a qualitative case study approach, this study shows that the integration of digital platforms, communicative teaching methods, and international collaboration can improve student learning outcomes and engagement. Institutions that apply blended learning, flipped classrooms, and industry-based Arabic courses show higher levels of adaptability and relevance. However, obstacles such as inequality of access to technology, lack of qualified lecturers, and low student motivation remain major challenges. This study contributes to the development of the field of study by presenting strategies for reforming the Arabic language curriculum based on national standards (KKNI) and international standards (ACTFL). The findings also recommend the need for further empirical evaluation and expanded cooperation with global institutions to ensure the quality and competitiveness of Arabic language learning in the long term.

Keywords: Arabic Language Curriculum, Higher Education, Curriculum Innovation, Digital Learning, MBKM, ACTFL, Blended Learning.

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Introduction

Arabic is a global language that has a strategic position in the realm of Islamic science, international communication, and cultural development. As the language of the Qur'an and hadith, Arabic is the main medium in exploring the treasures of classical and contemporary Islam. In Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, learning Arabic is not only a religious necessity, but also a means of communication between nations and an instrument of strengthening scientific identity. (Fitrianto, et al. 2024, pp. 137–152.)

At the private university (PTS) level, Arabic is taught in various study programs, especially under the auspices of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Ushuluddin. However, the challenges of globalization, digitalization of education, and changing job market needs demand innovation in the curriculum system and applied learning methods. Without significant adaptation, Arabic language learning is at risk of stagnation and being abandoned by the younger generation. (Sartikamanurung, 2025, 12)



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The curriculum of the Arabic study program at private universities has the potential to be developed flexibly and responsive to the challenges of the times. This flexibility allows for integration between the national curriculum based on the KKNI and the typical needs of the respective institutions. A good curriculum not only contains theoretical aspects, but also emphasizes the mastery of the four main language skills: *istima'*, *kalam*, *qira'ah*, and *kitabah*. (Kasmiati, 2020).

Curriculum innovation is the key word to answer contemporary challenges. Approaches such as task-based learning, communicative language teaching (CLT), and the use of digital technology are alternative solutions that have begun to be implemented in various private universities. Through this approach, Arabic language learning is no longer one-way, but collaborative, contextual, and based on student learning experience. (Muhammad Samin et al., 2023).

One form of real innovation is the collaboration between private universities in Indonesia and international institutions, such as Saudi Electronic University, in the use of the WhiteBoard application. The app offers online Arabic learning with various levels and interactive features, such as *maharah lughawiyah* exercises and automatic evaluations. This collaboration proves the importance of global networks in improving the quality of Arabic language education.

Not only that, scientific forums such as the National Meeting and the International Conference of the Association of Arabic Language Education Study Programs (PPPBA) also strengthen innovation. In the forum, academics and practitioners of Arabic language education discussed to create an adaptive learning ecosystem that is able to answer the challenges of the digital era and the needs of the world of work.

On the other hand, it is also important to integrate the concept of an informal language environment in Arabic learning on campus. This environment includes learning experiences through extracurricular activities, social media, and immersive programs that prioritize real language practices (Muzakki et al., 2025). Thus, students will be more accustomed to using Arabic in everyday and cross-cultural contexts.

The main challenge faced by private universities is to foster student learning motivation. Many students consider Arabic to be less relevant than other foreign languages such as English, Chinese, or Korean. For this reason, it is important for lecturers and institutions to instill awareness that Arabic has broad prospects in the fields of diplomacy, halal tourism, journalism, and the development of digital Islamic content (Kholiq, 2025).

In addition to motivation, the quality of lecturers and curriculum developers is also a crucial factor. Not all lecturers have a background in modern foreign language teaching methodologies (Hawa et al., 2025). Therefore, it is necessary to continue training and collaboration with professional institutions such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) so that learning is more standardized and professional.

One of the solutions approaches is to adopt the learning system from Al-Azhar University and the Islamic University of Medina which is based on practice and language immersion. The *I'dad Lughawi* model from Al-Azhar, for example, emphasizes intensive learning of Arabic skills in an integrated manner. Meanwhile, the Islamic University of Medina emphasizes the CLT approach that is relevant to the communication needs of today's students. In the context of national policy, the Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) program also provides opportunities for Arabic study programs to organize student exchanges, internships at translation institutions, and collaborative research. This allows students to gain practical experience and work skills needed in the industrial era 4.0. (Mutholib & Munajat, 2024, 1–14.)

The use of digital media such as Moodle, Google Classroom, to artificial intelligence-based applications such as Suno.ai and Duolingo Arabic has also begun to be applied to support students' *istima'* and *kalam* skills. This innovation facilitates a learning process that is not only limited to the classroom, but can also be done independently anywhere. Therefore, the blended learning and flipped classroom approach is an important strategy that can be applied in private universities. This model dynamically combines offline and online lectures, allowing students to understand the material independently before class discussions (Nur & Ramadan, 2025; Umam, 2021). This approach is in line with the development of Generation Z's more interactive and visual learning style.

With all the challenges and opportunities that exist, the future of Arabic language learning at Indonesian private universities will be largely determined by the institution's courage in innovating, building global cooperation, and designing a curriculum that is responsive to the changing times. Therefore, the reform of the Arabic language learning system is not only a must, but a necessity to create

graduates who are globally competitive and contribute to the development of an inclusive and advanced Islamic civilization.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design with a case study approach that aims to examine the implementation of innovative Arabic curriculum strategies in Private Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIS) in Indonesia, especially in the framework of the Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) policy. This study does not manipulate variables, but rather utilizes naturalistic observation and document analysis to capture ongoing educational practices in depth. The focus of the research is directed at understanding how curriculum innovation is applied in the context of MBKM policies so that it can provide a real picture of the dynamics of Arabic language learning in the university environment.

The research subjects consisted of Arabic lecturers, curriculum developers, and academic officials from three private Islamic universities in the Central Java region, Indonesia. The selection of subjects was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, namely by selecting institutions that actively implement the MBKM program and integrate digital innovations in Arabic language learning. In total, there were 12 participants involved, consisting of 7 men and 5 women, with the criteria of having at least five years of experience in teaching or developing the Arabic curriculum. The involvement of these subjects allows the research to gain diverse perspectives in terms of pedagogy and policy.

The research instruments are systematically compiled to support comprehensive data collection. Semi-structured interviews are used as the primary instruments, with guidelines developed based on previous research (Mutholib & Munajat, 2024; Samin et al., 2023). In addition, observation sheets are used to record directly the application of learning innovations both in the classroom and through digital platforms. Document analysis is also used to examine the curriculum syllabus, MBKM activity reports, and internal institutional policies relevant to the development of Arabic language learning.

With the combination of these methods, this study seeks to present a comprehensive overview of the practice of implementing innovative Arabic curriculum strategies within the scope of MBKM. The approach used allows researchers to understand the educational context in a naturalistic manner, identify challenges and opportunities that arise, and explore the real contribution of MBKM policies to improving the quality of Arabic language learning at PTKI.

Results and Discussion

This research shows that Arabic language learning curriculum innovation in private universities has great potential in responding to contemporary challenges, such as technological developments, job market needs, and socio-cultural changes. Different from previous studies that tend to focus on classical theory-based teaching, the results of this analysis emphasize the importance of strengthening practical aspects, integrating digital technology, and a flexible approach based on Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) as the main pillars of innovation.

One of the key findings is that international cooperation, such as collaboration with Saudi Electronic University and the use of the WhiteBoard application, has a positive impact on the quality of learning. This learning model not only provides comprehensive material, but also supports the development of the four language skills (istima', kalam, qira'ah, and kitabah) in a systematic and structured manner. This shows a more modern approach compared to the grammatical-translation method that is still dominant on several campuses (Melki et al., 2021).

The PPPBA National Meeting discussion also strengthened the role of lecturers and curriculum developers in creating a collaborative and creative space between universities. This distinguishes the results of this study from other studies that have not explored the importance of the academic community in the development of adaptive curricula. Significantly, the adaptation of classic books such as *Durusul Lughah* with technological media proves that traditional materials can be revived through digital approaches. This supports the initial hypothesis that a blended learning approach will be an effective solution in the era of educational disruption. These findings are in line with the flipped classroom learning model, where students actively learn independently with the help of multimedia before face-to-face sessions.

Nevertheless, these results also reveal important obstacles. Low student motivation and a lack of qualified teaching staff are two key factors that hinder the success of this innovation. These findings

support previous reports but place new emphasis on the need for a more applicative and industry-based curriculum design. The evaluation also shows that the MBKM program is still not maximized evenly in all private universities. Students are not yet heavily involved in professional practices such as internships in Islamic media or Arabic translation institutions, which should be the main path of strengthening practical competence. In the context of generalization, these results are more relevant for private universities that have flexibility in curriculum design. However, it should be noted that differences in facilities, geographic location, and human resource capabilities affect the level of effectiveness of the implementation of learning innovations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, these findings confirm the importance of an integrative and contextual approach in the teaching of Arabic. This approach emphasizes not only linguistic aspects, but also on cultural mastery, communication, and applicative skills, as suggested by Richards and Rodgers (2014) in *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Practically, universities need to review the KKNI-based curriculum and adapt it to international standards such as ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) to ensure the global competitiveness of graduates (ACTFL, 2023). The integration of learning technology has also been shown to expand the reach and effectiveness of teaching, particularly through digital platforms and AI applications such as Duolingo, Moodle, and Google Classroom, as stated by Warschauer & Healey (1998) that the use of technology in language learning can increase motivation and learning efficiency.

Limitations and Recommendations

Some of the limitations of these results include the uneven implementation of technology between universities and the lack of quantitative data to measure the effectiveness of the new curriculum. This is in line with the findings of Albirini (2006), who noted that the readiness of infrastructure and educator training are key factors in the application of Arabic language learning technology. Further studies with evaluative designs are needed to empirically test the effectiveness of these innovative programs (Sugiyono, 2017). It is also suggested that there be intensive training for lecturers in the use of technology and strengthening international partnerships, such as with universities in the Middle East, as part of a strategy to improve the quality of learning and competitiveness of graduates globally (Hassani, 2021). In addition, theoretically, the approach to learning Arabic at the university level must integrate competency-based learning principles that are relevant to the needs of the world of work. The integration between the Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based curriculum and student-centered learning allows students to develop discourse analysis, critical thinking, and cultural adaptation skills. Practically, the curriculum needs to include industry-based courses such as Arabic for Media, Halal Tourism, and Digital Islamic Content Writing to prepare graduates who are not only proficient in the language, but also ready to enter the professional and creative world of work.

As for the context of implementation, challenges such as the limitations of digital infrastructure and resistance to change from teachers need serious attention. Some private universities in the region still do not have access to adequate technological tools, which has an impact on the gap in learning quality between regions. Therefore, strategic recommendations include special funding from the government or donor institutions for the development of technology facilities, as well as the preparation of a roadmap for the development of lecturer human resources in the field of digital pedagogy and technology literacy. In addition, periodic evaluations of the curriculum need to be carried out to ensure that Arabic language learning remains adaptive to the dynamics of the times and global needs.

Conclusion

This research makes a significant contribution to the discourse on the development of Arabic language learning curriculum in private Islamic universities in Indonesia, especially in the context of today's educational transformation. The results of the study show that the implementation of a responsive and innovative curriculum through the integration of technology, communicative teaching methods, and global academic collaboration can overcome various contemporary challenges, such as low student learning motivation, limited professional readiness of graduates, and inequality between theoretical

content and practical needs. By incorporating contextual, digital, and industry-based elements into the curriculum, Arabic language education can be revitalized into a relevant and competitive field of study.

From a scientific point of view, this work enriches current knowledge by offering practical strategies that are rooted in national standards (KKNI) and international frameworks (such as ACTFL), and in line with the Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy. These findings provide a strong justification for the need for sustainable curriculum reform, digital infrastructure improvement, and lecturer training in pedagogical technology. Further research is recommended to conduct a longitudinal empirical evaluation of these innovations, explore the measurement of learning outcomes in an immersive environment, and explore expandable international partnerships. With these steps, Arabic language learning can continue to be relevant and produce graduates who are able to contribute academically and professionally in the digital-global era.

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