

Revisiting the Importance of Arabic Language Learning in *Pesantren* Based Universities: Evidence from Universitas Riyadlul Ulum Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

¹*Agus Riyadi, ²Mohamed Ibrahim Nadhiy Bukhairy

¹University of Riyadlul Ulum Tasikmalaya, ²Islamic University of Minnesota

*Correspondenc: agusriyadi@stiabiru.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study examines the strategic importance, the challenges, and the development of Arabic language learning in a single *pesantren*-based university, Universitas Riyadlul Ulum Tasikmalaya, and asks how communicative competence, *pesantren* academic culture, and students' global competencies relate within one institutional case. **Methodology:** A qualitative case study was conducted with thirteen purposively selected participants: three Arabic lecturers, eight undergraduate students, and two program administrators. Data from semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and institutional documents were analysed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model and triangulated to ensure trustworthiness. **Main Findings:** Arabic supported access to Islamic sources, sustained *pesantren* academic culture, and opened global academic and professional pathways. However, grammar-oriented instruction, limited communicative practice, a weak *bi'ah lughawiyah*, and minimal digital integration constrained students' communicative competence; grammar-dominated teaching was the most frequently referenced barrier across the interviews. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** Rather than applying a ready-made model, the study derives, from this single case, an integrative framework linking communicative competence, *pesantren* academic culture, and global competence. It argues that such simultaneous integration, still rarely examined together, is a case-grounded proposition that requires validation across multiple institutions.

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A. Introduction

Arabic occupies a strategic position in Islamic higher education because it is the language of the Qur'an, the Hadith, and a vast body of classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship. In *pesantren*-based universities, Arabic proficiency is essential not only for understanding religious sources but also for academic literacy, intellectual development, and intercultural communication. In an increasingly interconnected world, the role of Arabic now extends beyond religious study into international education, diplomacy, Islamic finance, the halal industry, and cross-cultural engagement (Alenezi, 2023; Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Kamal, 2025).

At the same time, the rapid advancement of digital technology has reshaped language learning by enabling more interactive, collaborative, and learner-centred instruction. Learning-management systems, mobile applications, and online communication tools have become important resources for improving proficiency and engagement, and Islamic higher-education institutions are increasingly expected to develop Arabic learning models that combine communicative competence, digital literacy, and global skills (Akmansyah et al.,

2024; Ghani & Daud, 2018). These expectations make the present case both timely and consequential.

Pesantren-based universities occupy a distinctive position in this landscape. They carry a dual mandate, preserving the classical Islamic scholarship transmitted through Arabic while also preparing graduates for contemporary academic and professional life. Students typically arrive with varied prior exposure to Arabic, and research has shown that a *pesantren* background measurably shapes the Arabic competence students bring into higher education (Azizah et al., 2024). The institution at the centre of this study, which embeds its Arabic programme within a boarding-school (*ma'had*) tradition, is therefore a particularly informative site for examining how religious, academic, and global purposes for Arabic meet in a single setting.

The study is framed by three complementary lenses that are introduced here rather than invoked only after the fact. Communicative competence theory distinguishes grammatical knowledge from the ability to use language appropriately in real contexts and treats the latter as the goal of instruction (Canale & Swain, 1980). A sociocultural account treats language as a tool for constructing knowledge through assisted social interaction, with learning occurring within a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The input hypothesis holds that acquisition depends on access to abundant comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). Read together, these lenses predict that an Arabic programme rich in rules but poor in authentic interaction and exposure will produce exactly the gap between knowledge and use that this case investigates, and they motivate the integrative reading developed in the findings.

Despite this strategic importance, Arabic instruction in Indonesian Islamic higher education remains, in many settings, predominantly grammar-oriented, emphasising the mastery of linguistic rules (*nahw* and *şarf*) over communicative language use (Rasyid, 2021; Baroroh & Tolinggi, 2020). As a result, many students acquire theoretical knowledge of Arabic grammar yet struggle to use the language effectively in academic and social communication.

A second, related constraint is the limited development of a supportive Arabic-speaking environment, the *bi'ah lughawiyah*. Studies in *pesantren* and *ma'had* settings show that sustained, habitual exposure to Arabic in daily life is among the strongest predictors of speaking proficiency and communicative confidence (Kasmantoni, 2022; Suryadarma et al., 2024; Maghfurin et al., 2023). Where such an environment is weak, students have few authentic opportunities to practise the language beyond the classroom.

The consequences of these constraints reach beyond the classroom. As Arabic increasingly mediates international study, scholarship, and professional work in fields such as Islamic finance and the halal economy, graduates who can parse classical grammar but cannot communicate, write, or present in Arabic are placed at a competitive disadvantage. For a *pesantren*-based university that markets Arabic as a defining strength, the gap between grammatical knowledge and communicative ability is therefore not only a pedagogical concern but also a matter of institutional mission and graduate competitiveness (Kamal, 2025; Yusuf, 2024).

Recent scholarship has illuminated several of these dimensions individually. Communicative approaches have been shown to improve speaking skills relative to grammar-translation methods (Baroroh & Tolinggi, 2020; Maghfurin et al., 2023); willingness-to-communicate research has examined the affective side of Arabic use (Maryani et al., 2024); and reviews of educational technology have mapped the promise and the limits of e-learning

and mobile applications for Arabic (Akmansyah et al., 2024; Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). Each of these contributions, however, tends to isolate a single facet of the problem.

The gap this study addresses is therefore an integrative one. Nasution and Rizkiyah (2022) demonstrated that Arabic contributes to the academic culture of *pesantren* universities, and Maryani et al. (2024) and Kasmantoni (2022) examined communicative disposition and the language environment respectively; yet no study among these has examined how communicative competence, *pesantren* academic culture, and students' global competencies operate together within one *pesantren*-based university. Empirical case studies set specifically in *pesantren* universities also remain comparatively scarce next to studies of general Islamic institutions.

Accordingly, the contribution of this study is not to assert a ready-made model but to derive, from a single bounded case, an integrative framework that connects three dimensions: communicative competence, *pesantren* academic culture, and students' global competencies. The framework is presented as a finding that emerges from the data of this case rather than as a pre-existing theory applied to it, and the study is explicit that the proposition requires testing across multiple sites.

Guided by this aim, the study seeks to (1) analyse the urgency of Arabic language learning at Universitas Riyadlul Ulum Tasikmalaya; (2) identify the challenges encountered in implementing Arabic instruction; and (3) formulate, from the evidence, development strategies suited to *pesantren*-based higher education in an era of globalisation and digital transformation.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design in order to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding of Arabic language learning at a single institution. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research sought to interpret participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural setting rather than to measure variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was suited to the problem because Arabic learning at the university constitutes a bounded system whose characteristics, challenges, and development strategies can be examined comprehensively in context (Yin, 2018).

The research site was Universitas Riyadlul Ulum Tasikmalaya, a *pesantren*-based university in West Java, Indonesia, whose Arabic programme is embedded in a wider Islamic boarding-school tradition. Fieldwork was carried out over one academic semester, from March to June 2024, which allowed the researchers to observe routine instruction as well as periodic Arabic-based academic activities. The single-site, time-bounded design is a deliberate feature of the case study and is revisited as a limitation in the conclusion.

The institutional context is integral to the case. The university combines a conventional higher-education structure with the pedagogical habits of the *pesantren*: classical texts are studied in their original Arabic, religious knowledge is transmitted through Arabic sources, and a residential *ma'had* environment surrounds formal classes. This setting makes the relationship between formal Arabic instruction and the surrounding language environment unusually visible, and it is precisely this relationship that the study set out to document.

The study utilised both primary and secondary sources. Primary data came from the participants described above; secondary data came from institutional documents, including

the curriculum, course syllabi, and academic regulations relevant to Arabic instruction. The choice of semi-structured interviews as the principal technique reflects their suitability, relative to closed surveys, for eliciting rich, exploratory accounts of participants' experiences and reasoning (Jain, 2021), while observation and documents allowed those accounts to be cross-checked against practice and policy.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their knowledge of, and active involvement in, Arabic language learning. The final sample comprised thirteen participants: three Arabic lecturers with between five and fifteen years of teaching experience, eight undergraduate students drawn from the second to the sixth semester, and two programme administrators responsible for curriculum and language policy. To protect confidentiality, participants are identified by codes (L1–L3 for lecturers, S1–S8 for students, and A1–A2 for administrators) throughout the findings.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. Thirteen semi-structured interviews, each lasting between forty and sixty minutes, were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim; they explored learning practices, perceived challenges, and improvement strategies. Non-participant observation of ten activities, including formal Arabic classes, classical-text (*kitab*) study, *bahtsul masail*, and everyday campus interaction, was conducted using an observation guide that recorded the contexts and frequency of Arabic use. Document analysis of the curriculum, course syllabi, and academic regulations provided institutional context. In keeping with qualitative inquiry, the researchers served as the primary instrument, supported by interview protocols, observation guides, and field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research observed established ethical procedures. Institutional permission was obtained, participation was voluntary, and all participants gave informed consent after being told the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved through the use of codes and the secure storage of recordings and transcripts; no identifying information is reported.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Two researchers first coded the transcripts and field notes independently, beginning with open coding and then developing a shared codebook; codes were grouped through axial coding into the themes reported below. Inter-coder agreement reached approximately 0.81, and the remaining discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Data collection and coding continued until thematic saturation was reached, that is, until additional data yielded no new codes.

To make the analytic process transparent, an example illustrates the path from raw data to theme. Statements such as “I memorise the grammar for the exam, but I still reach for the translation” were initially coded as exam-oriented grammar focus and reliance on translation; together with cognate codes from other transcripts and from the observation of grammar-dominated classes, these were grouped under the axial category grammar-oriented instruction, which in turn informed the higher-order theme of constrained communicative competence. The same procedure produced the four challenge themes summarised later in this section.

Field notes were written up within twenty-four hours of each observation, and interview recordings were transcribed promptly so that emerging questions could inform subsequent data collection. Transcripts, field notes, and document extracts were organised in

a single coding matrix that linked each code to its source, which supported both the inter-coder comparison and the audit trail described below. This iterative movement between collection and analysis is characteristic of the interactive model and allowed provisional interpretations to be tested against later data.

To strengthen trustworthiness, the study applied the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was supported through source and methodological triangulation and through member checking, in which four participants reviewed and confirmed the preliminary interpretations. Transferability is supported by the thick description provided in the findings; dependability by an audit trail documenting analytic decisions; and confirmability by reflexive attention to the researchers' own positionality as Arabic educators, which was recorded and monitored throughout the study.

The overall research design, including the three data sources and the triangulation logic used to establish trustworthiness, is summarised in Figure 1.

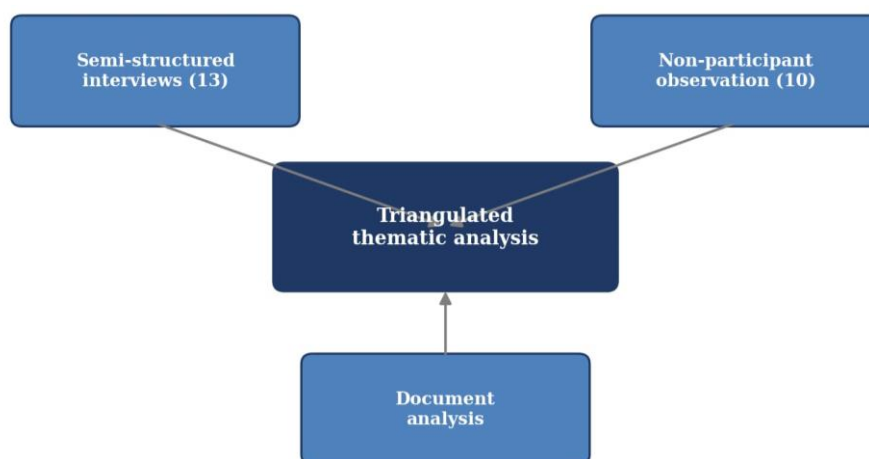


Figure 1. Data sources and triangulation in the case study design

C. Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings from interviews, observations, and documents, organised around the study's three guiding dimensions and the challenges and strategies that emerged. The thirteen participants are summarised in Table 1, and representative quotations and observational detail are provided so that each interpretive claim is visibly grounded in the data.

Table 1. Profile of Research Participants (N = 13)

Code	Role	Number	Background
L1–L3	Arabic lecturers	3	5–8 years' teaching experience
S1–S8	Undergraduate students	8	2nd–6th semester
A1–A2	Programme administrators	2	Curriculum and language policy

Source: Primary data (fieldwork, June–July 2025)

Arabic as a Gateway to Understanding Islamic Knowledge

Across the interviews, participants consistently positioned Arabic as the indispensable key to the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the classical texts (*turath*). Lecturers reported that students with stronger Arabic could interpret religious texts more independently and join more critical discussion of contemporary Islamic issues. As one lecturer put it:

"A student who controls nahw and şarf reads the kitab with understanding, not only recitation; without Arabic, everything arrives second-hand through translation." (L1)

Yet the same participants described a persistent difficulty in reading unvocalised texts without translation. During classical-text sessions, the observation notes recorded that most exchanges concerned grammatical parsing rather than the meaning or argument of the passage, and several students said they experienced Arabic primarily as a set of rules to be passed:

"Honestly, I memorise the grammar for the exam, but when I face a new text I still freeze and reach for the translation." (S3)

Interpreting these data, Arabic at the institution functions as more than a linguistic medium; it is an epistemological instrument for accessing primary sources. The data, however, also show a gap between this aspiration and a grammar-bound classroom reality. This pattern echoes earlier reports of grammar-dominant Arabic instruction in Islamic higher education (Rasyid, 2021; Baroroh & Tolinggi, 2020) and points, from the standpoint of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), to the need to move from rule mastery toward literacy-oriented, meaning-focused engagement with texts.

The thickness of this pattern is worth detailing, because it shows how the constraint operates in practice rather than merely asserting it. In one observed session on a fiqh text, a forty-minute period was given almost entirely to identifying grammatical functions, with only the final minutes addressing what the passage actually argued; students copied the parsing accurately but offered little when asked to summarise the author's reasoning. A senior student described the resulting habit candidly:

"We are trained to find the i'rab first. Meaning comes later, if there is time. So I am confident with grammar but slow with understanding." (S7)

Read against the study's framework, this is not a failure of effort but a predictable outcome of a system that rewards formal accuracy over communicative use; it is precisely the kind of imbalance that a literacy-oriented, communicative redesign is meant to correct.

Arabic and the Development of *Pesantren* Academic Culture

Observation across the fieldwork period showed that Arabic remained central to the scholarly life of the institution. It was the working language of *kitab kuning* study and surfaced in *bahtsul masail* and structured academic discussion, where students who participated actively displayed stronger academic literacy and critical reasoning. An administrator framed Arabic as constitutive of the institution's identity:

"Our academic tradition lives in Arabic. When the students argue a legal question in bahtsul masail, they are not just practising language; they are doing scholarship the way the pesantren has always done it." (A1)

Beyond these formal settings, however, Arabic use thinned markedly. Field notes recorded that everyday interaction among students was conducted overwhelmingly in Indonesian, and Arabic-based activities tended to be scheduled and occasional rather than habitual. The *bi'ah lughawiyah*, in other words, was real but not yet woven into the daily fabric of campus life.

These observations support a sociocultural reading of learning, in which language is a tool for constructing knowledge through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). They also extend Nasution and Rizkiyah (2022): whereas that study established that Arabic contributes to *pesantren* academic culture, the present case specifies the mechanism and its limit,

showing that the contribution is concentrated in formal scholarly events and attenuates wherever an everyday Arabic-speaking environment is absent.

The distribution of Arabic across activities, set out in Figure 3 below, makes this concentration tangible: Arabic was the working language in the great majority of formal classes and classical-text sessions, yet its presence dropped steeply in dormitory and canteen interaction. A student involved in the language section described the institution's periodic efforts and their fragility:

"When there is an Arabic Day or a muhadatsah programme, the campus suddenly feels alive in Arabic. But after the event we slide back to Indonesian within a day or two." (S5)

This rhythm, intense bursts of Arabic around scheduled events followed by a return to Indonesian, is the practical signature of a *bi'ah lughawiyah* that exists as activity but not yet as habit. The interpretive point, distinct from the observation itself, is that academic culture and language environment are coupled: sustaining the former at scale appears to depend on institutionalising the latter.

Arabic and the Development of Students' Global Competencies

Participants increasingly framed Arabic as a strategic asset beyond religious study. Students linked proficiency to scholarships in the Middle East, international academic forums, and careers in diplomacy, Islamic finance, and the halal industry:

"If I master Arabic, the door to Al-Azhar or Madinah opens, and even in business the halal and Islamic-finance sector needs people who can read Arabic contracts." (S2)

Nonetheless, instruction remained oriented to classical comprehension and grammar, with limited attention to professional communication, academic writing, or translation. Lecturers acknowledged that graduates might therefore leave with strong textual knowledge but underdeveloped competencies for global academic and professional participation. This finding aligns with calls to align Arabic education with global competence and internationalisation (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Yusuf, 2024) and with outcomes-based reform in Indonesian higher education (Mufanti et al., 2024), and it suggests that Arabic learning here should integrate religious, academic, and global dimensions rather than privileging the first alone.

An administrator made the institutional stakes of this gap explicit, linking Arabic to the university's competitive positioning:

"We tell parents that Arabic is our advantage. But if our graduates cannot write a proposal or present at a conference in Arabic, that advantage stays on paper." (A2)

The observation and document data supported this concern: syllabi emphasised reading and grammar, and few assessed tasks required extended productive use of Arabic for academic or professional purposes. Interpreting these data, the global-competence dimension is present in students' aspirations and in institutional rhetoric, but it is not yet operationalised in curriculum and assessment, a disjunction that the development strategies below are designed to address.

Challenges in Arabic Language Learning

Coding of the interviews and field notes converged on four interlocking challenges: the dominance of grammar-oriented instruction, limited communicative competence, a weak *bi'ah lughawiyah*, and minimal integration of digital technology. Figure 2 displays how

frequently each theme was referenced across the thirteen participants; grammar-dominated instruction was the most prominent.

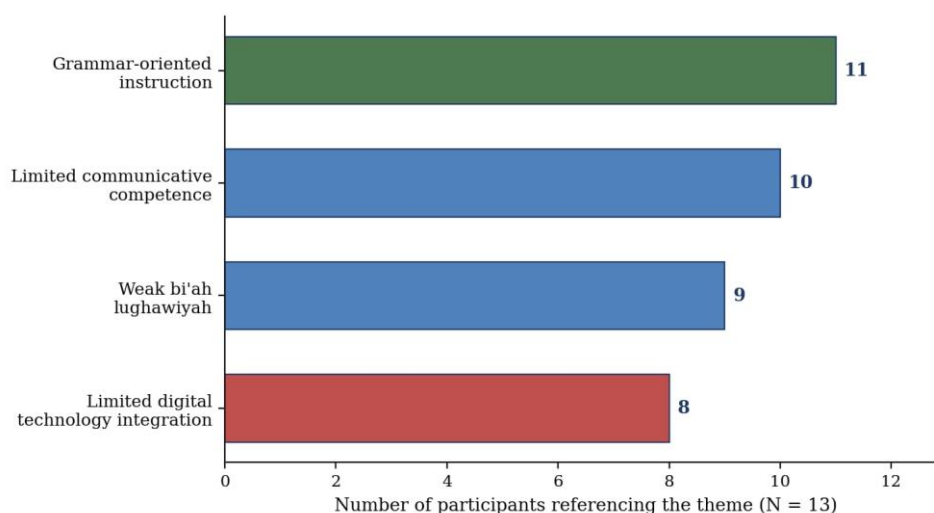


Figure 2. Distribution of coded references to the four challenge themes (N = 13 participants)

Participants tied these challenges together in practice. A lecturer captured the core tension between knowledge of rules and ability to use them:

“My students can explain the grammar of a sentence perfectly, but ask them to say three sentences about their day in Arabic and they hesitate.” (L2)

This hesitation, observed repeatedly, is the behavioural face of the second challenge, limited communicative competence. In paired speaking tasks during observed classes, most students could supply isolated vocabulary and correct verb forms but struggled to sustain even short exchanges, frequently switching to Indonesian to repair breakdowns (Fitria et al., 2025). The pattern indicates that grammatical knowledge had not been converted into communicative ability, consistent with the distinction at the heart of communicative-competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980) and with the willingness-to-communicate difficulties reported among Arabic learners elsewhere (Maryani et al., 2024).

The observational data make the environmental constraint concrete. As shown in Figure 3, Arabic was the active medium in most formal classes and in classical-text study, but its use fell sharply in everyday campus interaction and in online or digital communication, where Indonesian dominated.

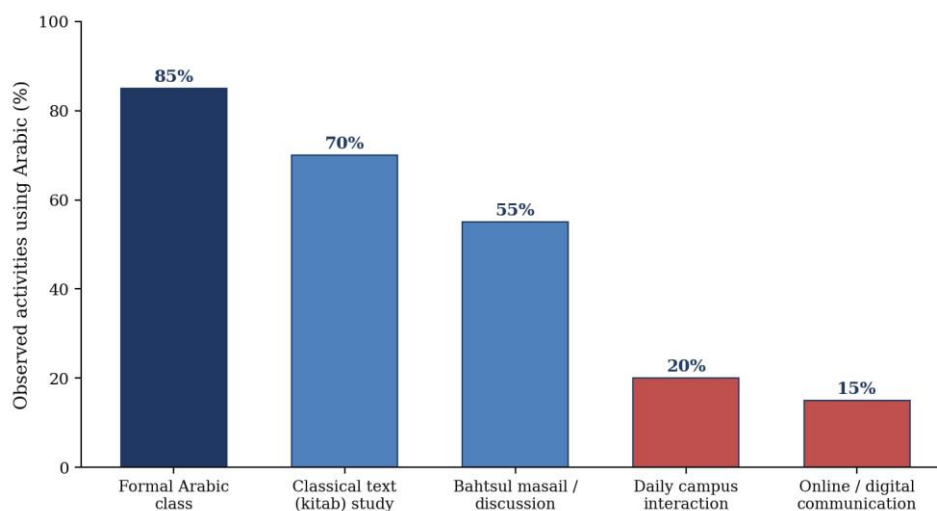


Figure 3. Contexts and frequency of observed Arabic use across activities

Read through second-language theory, this pattern is consequential. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis holds that acquisition depends on abundant comprehensible input; the thinness of Arabic outside formal settings therefore directly limits the input available for acquisition. From a Vygotskian perspective (1978), the scarcity of authentic, assisted interaction narrows the zone of proximal development in which students could move, with peer and lecturer support, from controlled grammar exercises to independent communication. The limited digital integration compounds the problem: although e-learning and mobile applications can extend authentic exposure and interaction (Akmansyah et al., 2024; Ghani & Daud, 2018), participants reported that such tools were used only sporadically.

The digital dimension deserves separate emphasis, because it was the challenge participants found easiest to imagine solving yet hardest to sustain. Document analysis of the syllabi found almost no required use of digital tools for productive Arabic, and observation recorded that, where technology appeared, it was typically a slide or a video shown by the lecturer rather than an interactive task performed by students. A student captured the lost potential:

"We all have phones and use apps for English. For Arabic there is nothing organised, so the practice that could happen on our phones simply does not happen." (S6)

This gap matters for acquisition as much as for engagement: well-designed applications and online interaction can extend comprehensible input and authentic communication well beyond contact hours (Akmansyah et al., 2024; Gu et al., 2024). Left unaddressed, limited digital integration narrows the already thin channels through which students might encounter and use Arabic, reinforcing the other three challenges rather than offsetting them.

Strategies and the Emerging Integrative Framework

From the same evidence, four strategic directions emerged: institutionalising the *bi'ah lughawiyah* through habitual programmes such as *muhadatsah*, language days, and speech activities; developing a communicative curriculum that foregrounds meaningful use alongside textual mastery; integrating digital technology to widen access and interaction; and deliberately combining *pesantrén* tradition with modern educational practice. Comparable programmes elsewhere have been associated with stronger speaking proficiency and communicative confidence (Kasmantoni, 2022; Suryadarma et al., 2024; Maghfurin et al., 2023; Maryani et al., 2024).

These four strategies are not independent fixes; in the participants' accounts they reinforce one another and connect the study's three dimensions. It is this observed interdependence in the data, between what enables learning (the four strategies) and what learning is for (religious literacy, academic culture, and global competence), that the study renders as an integrative framework. Figure 4 presents that framework as a finding derived from the case rather than as a model imposed on it (Riyadi et al., 2025).

Each strategy also has concrete precedents that the institution could adapt. Communicative and content-based designs, including content and language integrated learning in *pesantren* settings, have been associated with stronger Arabic proficiency (Muhammad Iqbal et al., 2025), and blended approaches can reinforce integrated language skills (Ahmad, 2021). On the technological side, needs-based digital-literacy speaking syllabuses (Gu et al., 2024) and structured *bi'ah lughawiyah* programmes that explicitly target communicative competence (Suryani & Andrian, 2026) offer practical templates. The contribution of the present case is to suggest that these be pursued together rather than piecemeal, since each addresses a different facet of the same constrained system.

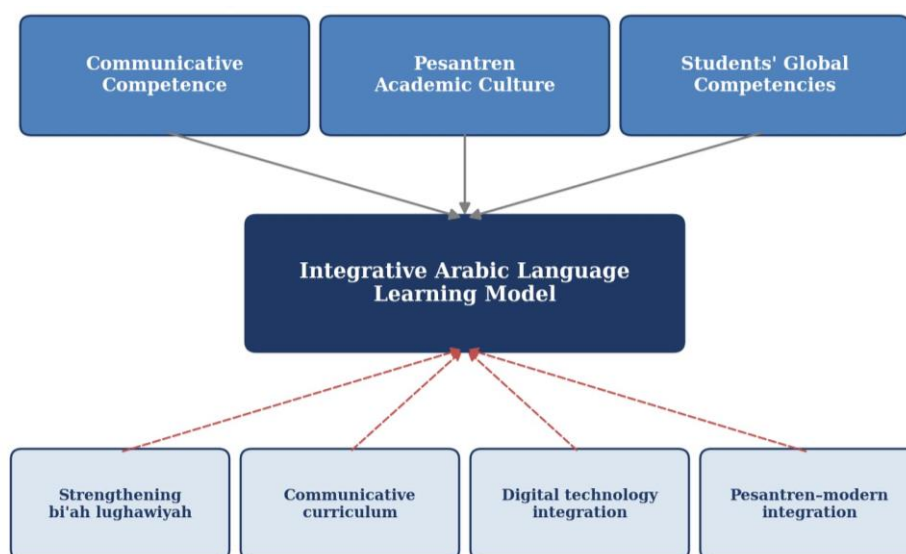


Figure 4. An integrative framework for Arabic language learning in pesantren-based higher education, derived from the case

Table 2 summarises how each principal finding maps onto a corresponding development implication, making the line from evidence to recommendation explicit.

Table 2. Summary of Findings and Their Development Implications

No.	Finding	Implication
1	Arabic underpins access to Islamic primary sources	Strengthen literacy-oriented, critical reading alongside grammar
2	Arabic sustains <i>pesantren</i> academic culture	Institutionalise Arabic-based academic activities in daily life
3	Arabic enables students' global competencies	Align the curriculum with academic, professional, and global needs
4	Grammar-oriented instruction limits communicative competence	Adopt communicative language teaching approaches

No.	Finding	Implication
5	A weak <i>bi'ah lughawiyah</i> constrains acquisition	Develop a sustainable Arabic-speaking environment
6	Limited technology integration reduces effectiveness	Expand technology-enhanced, learner-centred instruction
7	Pesantren tradition and modern practice are not yet integrated	Develop an integrative Arabic language learning model

Source: Authors' analysis of interview, observation, and document data (2024)

Discussion

Taken together, the data show three things and invite one interpretation. The data show that Arabic at this institution opens access to Islamic sources, animates a recognisable scholarly culture, and is increasingly tied to global aspiration; they also show that grammar-dominated teaching, scarce communicative practice, a thin *bi'ah lughawiyah*, and sporadic technology use constrain communicative competence. The interpretation the study advances, distinct from these descriptive findings, is that these elements are not separate problems but facets of a single, addressable system.

The framework in Figure 4 follows from this interpretation rather than preceding it. Each link in the model is traceable to evidence: the centrality of communicative competence to the gap between grammatical knowledge and use (L2; Figure 2); the role of *pesantren* academic culture in the concentration of Arabic in formal scholarly events (A1; Figure 3); and the global-competence dimension in students' own articulation of mobility and career (S2). The enablers, likewise, are the strategies participants themselves proposed. Presenting the framework as case-derived keeps the claim proportionate to a single-site study.

Theoretically, the case lends situated support to communicative-competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980), to the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), and to a sociocultural account of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), by showing concretely how a weak language environment limits both comprehensible input and the assisted interaction on which a zone of proximal development depends. Practically, it offers *pesantren* universities a coherent agenda, connecting curriculum reform, environment building, and technology integration, rather than a list of disconnected interventions, and it complements internationalisation and outcomes-based reforms now underway in Indonesian Islamic higher education (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Mufanti et al., 2024; Kamal, 2025).

Placed beside the wider literature, the case is broadly consistent while remaining specific. Intervention studies report that restructured, active designs such as the flipped classroom can develop Arabic grammatical competence (Albahuoth, 2023), and recent reviews of teaching-material development point toward more digital, collaborative, and competency-based directions (Basid & Firmansyah, 2026; Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). The present findings neither confirm nor contradict those experimental results, since the design and purpose differ; rather, they help explain why such innovations may succeed or fail in a *pesantren* university, namely by clarifying the environmental and cultural conditions, captured in the integrative framework, that any intervention must engage. This is the sense in which a single-case study contributes to transferable understanding without claiming statistical generalisation.

These contributions should be read within the study's limits. The evidence comes from one institution and is partly self-reported; the coded frequencies in Figures 2 and 3

summarise qualitative material and are indicative, not statistical. The framework is therefore a hypothesis grounded in this case, and its value will depend on examination across multiple *pesantren* universities, ideally with mixed-methods designs that relate these strategies to measured language proficiency.

For practice and policy, the case suggests a sequence rather than a menu. Because the four challenges are coupled, isolated measures—adding an application here or an Arabic Day there—are unlikely to shift outcomes; what the evidence favours is a coordinated programme in which a communicative curriculum, a habitual language environment, and well-chosen digital tools are introduced together and assessed against communicative, not merely grammatical, criteria. Leadership commitment matters here, because institutionalising daily Arabic use, as opposed to staging periodic events, requires policy, staffing, and assessment changes that individual lecturers cannot make alone.

A brief methodological reflection is also warranted. The researchers' own background as Arabic educators afforded access and interpretive sensitivity but also carried a risk of confirmation; this was mitigated through independent double coding, member checking, and an audit trail, and by deliberately seeking disconfirming instances, such as students who reported confidence in communication or classes in which meaning, rather than parsing, led. Reporting these procedures is intended to let readers judge the credibility and transferability of the account for themselves, consistent with the trustworthiness criteria adopted in the methods.

Taken as a whole, the discussion returns to the study's central claim: that the importance of Arabic in a *pesantren*-based university is best understood not as a single virtue but as a system of coupled purposes and constraints. The value of revisiting that importance, as the title proposes, lies less in reaffirming that Arabic matters—few in this context would dispute it—than in specifying how its religious, academic, and global functions can be advanced together, and what must change in environment, curriculum, and technology for that integration to move from aspiration to routine.

D. Conclusion

This case study demonstrates that Arabic language learning at the University of Riyadlul Ulum Tasikmalaya plays a pivotal role in strengthening Islamic education, sustaining the academic culture of the *pesantren*, and preparing students for global competencies. Within this institutional context, Arabic serves not only as a medium for understanding the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic texts, but also as a vehicle for academic literacy, critical thinking, and international engagement. Nevertheless, the findings reveal four interconnected challenges that continue to hinder these objectives: the predominance of grammar-oriented instruction, limited communicative competence, a weak *bi'ah lughawiyah* (Arabic language environment), and the insufficient integration of digital technology into teaching and learning. Based on these findings, the study proposes an integrative framework linking communicative competence, *pesantren* academic culture, and global competence through the reinforcement of the Arabic-speaking environment, the implementation of a communicative curriculum, the integration of digital technologies, and the deliberate combination of *pesantren* traditions with contemporary educational practices. As this framework is derived from a single bounded case, it should be regarded as an empirically informed proposition that requires further validation before broader generalisation.

The study is limited to one pesantren-based university and relies on qualitative evidence, including partly self-reported data; consequently, its findings are analytically rather than statistically generalisable. Future research should therefore validate the proposed framework across multiple pesantren universities using comparative, mixed-methods, or quasi-experimental designs. Such studies should examine the effectiveness of communicative curricula, bi'ah lughawiyah programmes, and technology-enhanced learning in improving measurable Arabic language proficiency. Multi-site comparisons may determine whether the relationship among communicative competence, pesantren academic culture, and global competence identified in this study is consistent across institutions with different geographical, organisational, and curricular characteristics. In addition, longitudinal research could investigate whether sustained language-environment programmes produce lasting improvements in communicative confidence and language use, while design-based studies could evaluate the framework as an integrated intervention by measuring its impact on speaking, writing, and translation skills rather than grammatical knowledge alone.

The findings also suggest important practical implications for both institutional leaders and policymakers. Universities with pesantren traditions are encouraged to institutionalise a sustainable Arabic-speaking environment, redesign Arabic curricula to emphasise communicative and academic competencies, and expand the integration of digital technologies to enrich authentic language learning experiences. At the policy level, educational authorities should support innovative programmes that harmonise the strengths of pesantren traditions with contemporary global educational demands. Because each recommendation directly addresses challenges identified in the present study, their implementation should be accompanied by systematic evaluation to generate stronger empirical evidence and contribute to the continued development of Arabic language education in pesantren-based higher education institutions.

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