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Transforming Arabic Learning in Indonesian Pesantren: Policy, Teacher Competence, and Reform Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren, conceptualized as a multidimensional process involving curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, teacher professional development, institutional adaptation, and digital integration. The study aims to analyze the role of government policies, teacher competence, and reform challenges in supporting educational transformation. A qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA framework was conducted. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar, ERIC, and SINTA published between 2020 and 2025. Articles focusing on Arabic language learning, pesantren education, educational transformation, curriculum reform, and teacher competence were included, while conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, and irrelevant studies were excluded. Of 186 identified records, 42 articles met the eligibility criteria. The findings reveal that government policies have promoted curriculum flexibility, digitalization, and teacher professional development. However, transformation remains uneven, with larger and better-resourced pesantren demonstrating greater technological adaptation than smaller institutions. Major barriers include limited infrastructure, low digital literacy, and institutional resistance to change. This review is limited by the predominance of Indonesian-language publications and the scarcity of empirical field-based studies. The findings imply the need for equitable digital infrastructure, continuous teacher development, and context-sensitive policy implementation to support sustainable transformation in pesantren.

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Keyword

Arabic language learning; pesantren education; teacher competence; educational transformation

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل تحوّل تعليم اللغة العربية في المعاهد الإسلامية (البيسانترن) بإندونيسيا من خلال دراسة دور السياسات الحكومية وكفايات المعلمين وتحديات الإصلاح التربوي. ويُعرّف التحول في هذه الدراسة بوصفه عملية متعددة الأبعاد تشمل إصلاح المناهج، والابتكار التربوي، والتنمية المهنية للمعلمين، والتكيف المؤسسي، وتكامل

التقنيات الرقمية. واعتمدت الدراسة منهج المراجعة المنهجية للأدبيات (Systematic Literature Review) وفق إطار PRISMA وجمعت البيانات من المقالات العلمية المحكمة المفهرسة في قواعد بيانات Scopus و Google Scholar و ERIC و SINTA والمنشورة خلال الفترة 2020-2025. وشملت معايير الاختيار الدراسات المرتبطة بتعليم اللغة العربية، والتعليم في المعاهد الإسلامية، والتحول التربوي، وإصلاح المناهج، وكفايات المعلمين، في حين استُبعدت أعمال المؤتمرات والرسائل الجامعية والدراسات غير ذات الصلة. ومن أصل 186 دراسة أولية، استوفت 42 دراسة معايير الأهلية. وأظهرت النتائج أن السياسات الحكومية أسهمت في تعزيز مرونة المناهج، ورقمنة التعليم، وتنمية كفايات المعلمين. ومع ذلك، ظل التحول غير متكافئ؛ إذ أظهرت المعاهد الكبيرة والأفضل تجهيزاً قدرة أكبر على التكيف التقني مقارنة بالمعاهد الصغيرة. وتمثلت أبرز التحديات في ضعف البنية التحتية، وانخفاض الثقافة الرقمية، والمقاومة المؤسسية للتغيير. وتقتصر هذه المراجعة على هيمنة المنشورات باللغة الإندونيسية وقلّة الدراسات الميدانية التجريبية. وتشير النتائج إلى ضرورة تعزيز البنية التحتية الرقمية، وتطوير برامج التنمية المهنية المستدامة للمعلمين، وتطبيق سياسات تعليمية تراعي خصوصية المعاهد الإسلامية لضمان تحول تعليمي مستدام.

تعليم اللغة العربية؛ التعليم في البيسنترين؛ كفاءة المعلمين؛ التحول التربوي

الكلمات الرئيسية

INTRODUCTION

Global educational transformation in the twenty-first century has substantially reshaped language education systems, including Arabic language learning. Contemporary educational transformation extends beyond the adoption of digital technologies and encompasses curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, teacher professional development, assessment redesign, and institutional adaptation to rapidly changing educational environments. Within this broader perspective, Arabic language learning is increasingly expected to move from traditional grammar-oriented instruction toward communicative, learner-centered, and competency-based approaches capable of addressing the challenges of globalization, technological advancement, and evolving learner needs (Burhanuddin, 2024a; Haq et al., 2024; Iqbal et al., 2025). In Indonesia, these developments are particularly significant because Arabic remains an essential component of Islamic education and serves as a medium for accessing classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship (Hermawan et al., 2024; Muhajir, 2021; Mursidah, 2021).

Pesantren have historically played a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting Arabic language knowledge through the study of classical Islamic texts. However, the contemporary educational landscape requires pesantren to respond to increasing demands for digital literacy, communicative competence, critical thinking, and adaptive learning systems (Hanifa & Ali, 2025; Hidayatullah et al., 2025). According to the Education Management Information System (EMIS) of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia had approximately 39,167 pesantren and 4.49 million students in the 2022/2023 academic year. The diversity of these institutions in terms of organizational structure, educational orientation, infrastructure, and resource capacity creates substantial variation in their readiness to adopt educational reforms and educational innovation (El-Saha, 2025). Furthermore, national educational digitalization initiatives implemented after the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated expectations for technology integration across Islamic educational institutions. As a result, the transformation of Arabic language learning in

pesantren has emerged as a strategic issue within the broader discourse of Islamic educational reform in Indonesia (Musaddad & Sudarsono, 2025; Sopian et al., 2025; Suresman et al., 2025).

To facilitate educational transformation, the Indonesian government has introduced several policy initiatives, including Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren, the Merdeka Belajar policy framework, and digitalization programs implemented by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These initiatives aim to strengthen teacher professionalism, improve digital infrastructure, encourage curriculum flexibility, and promote the integration of technology into educational practice (Musa & Ghofur, 2026; Wibowo et al., 2025). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that policy implementation remains uneven across pesantren due to disparities in institutional readiness, technological infrastructure, organizational culture, and human resource capacity.

Recent studies have examined various aspects of Arabic language learning transformation. Several researchers have investigated technology integration, digital pedagogy, and teachers' digital literacy in Arabic language education (El Moatez et al., 2022; Hifzhi et al., 2024; Latifah et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2025). Other studies have focused on curriculum reform, communicative language teaching, contextual learning, and student-centered approaches within pesantren-based Arabic instruction (Alfulana et al., 2025; Fitriani, I., & Yuliana, 2024; Hanani et al., 2024; Malikh et al., 2025). Additional research has explored institutional adaptation and organizational challenges associated with educational transformation in Islamic boarding schools (Akhmad et al., 2023; Muzakky et al., 2023; Syahrul Munir et al., 2023; Z et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies have enriched the literature on Arabic education and Islamic educational reform.

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain in the existing literature. Most previous studies have examined digital learning, curriculum innovation, teacher readiness, or institutional adaptation as separate issues. Few studies have systematically synthesized how government policy, teacher competence, and reform challenges interact simultaneously in shaping the transformation of Arabic language learning within pesantren. More specifically, no recent systematic review has comprehensively analyzed how policy-driven reforms, teacher competencies, and institutional constraints collectively influence Arabic language learning transformation across diverse pesantren contexts in Indonesia. This gap is particularly important because educational transformation is rarely determined by a single factor; rather, it emerges through the interaction of policy, human resources, institutional culture, and pedagogical change.

Another issue that remains underexplored is the tension between preserving traditional pesantren values and responding to modernization demands. While digital technologies and curriculum reforms offer opportunities for improving educational quality, some pesantren communities express concerns that excessive modernization may weaken long-established traditions of learning and religious transmission. Consequently, educational transformation often involves balancing institutional continuity with innovation rather than replacing traditional practices altogether. Understanding this tension is essential for explaining variations in reform outcomes among different pesantren.

The concept of post-digital education provides an important context for this study. Post-digital education refers to educational environments in which digital technology is no longer viewed as a separate innovation but has become an integrated and normalized component of teaching, learning, and institutional management. From this perspective, the central challenge is not merely adopting technology but effectively integrating technological, pedagogical, organizational, and cultural dimensions of educational change.

Theoretically, this study is informed by Fullan's Educational Change Theory, which emphasizes the importance of leadership, institutional capacity, teacher readiness, and organizational culture in determining the success of educational reform. In addition, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework provides a useful lens for understanding the multidimensional competencies required of Arabic language teachers in contemporary educational settings. The integration of these theoretical perspectives enables a more comprehensive understanding of how policy, teacher competence, and institutional factors influence educational transformation (Halimah et al., 2024; Haq et al., 2024; Sidqi et al., 2025).

Against this background, the present study aims to analyze government policies supporting the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren, examine teacher readiness and competence in implementing educational reform, and identify major reform challenges together with potential strategic solutions. The study contributes theoretically by providing a comprehensive synthesis of recent literature on Arabic educational transformation and contributes practically by offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, curriculum developers, pesantren leaders, and Arabic language teachers seeking to develop more adaptive, innovative, and sustainable educational systems.

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METHOD

This study employed a qualitative systematic review with thematic synthesis to examine the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren, focusing on government policy, teacher competence, and educational reform challenges. A qualitative systematic review was selected because it enables researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize evidence from previous studies while generating broader conceptual interpretations of complex educational phenomena. The thematic synthesis approach was adopted following the framework proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008), which is widely used for synthesizing qualitative evidence in systematic review studies. This approach was considered appropriate for exploring educational transformation as a

multidimensional process involving policy implementation, pedagogical change, institutional adaptation, and teacher development within pesantren contexts.

The review process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. In this study, PRISMA was used as a reporting and article-selection protocol to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility in the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant studies. While PRISMA originated in systematic review and meta-analysis research, its procedures have been widely adopted in qualitative systematic reviews to improve methodological transparency and minimize selection bias.

This study employed a non-experimental review design because it did not involve direct intervention, manipulation of variables, or human participants. The units of analysis consisted of published scholarly articles addressing Arabic language learning transformation in pesantren and Islamic educational institutions.

The literature search was conducted using four academic databases: Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and SINTA-indexed Indonesian journals. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of educational, linguistic, and Islamic education research. The search focused on studies published between 2020 and 2025 to capture recent developments in Arabic language learning transformation during the post-pandemic and post-digital educational era.

The search strategy employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators, including “Arabic language learning,” “Arabic education,” “pesantren,” “Islamic boarding school,” “teacher competence,” “educational transformation,” “curriculum reform,” and “digital pedagogy.” The use of multiple keywords was intended to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. The initial search process yielded 186 articles.

The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025; (2) studies focusing on Arabic language learning, pesantren education, teacher competence, curriculum reform, educational transformation, or digital learning in Islamic educational institutions; and (3) articles published in English, Indonesian, or Arabic. Exclusion criteria included conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, book chapters, duplicate publications, and studies not directly related to the objectives of this review.

Following title screening, abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment, 42 articles met all inclusion criteria and were selected for the final synthesis. The selected studies were considered sufficient to represent contemporary scholarly discussions on Arabic language learning transformation in Indonesian pesantren.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic synthesis following Thomas and Harden’s (2008) framework. The process involved three stages. First, line-by-line coding was conducted to identify key concepts, findings, and arguments from each article. Second, related codes were grouped into descriptive themes representing recurring patterns across studies. Third, analytical themes were developed to generate broader interpretations regarding government policy, teacher competence, curriculum reform, digital transformation, and institutional challenges.

The analysis emphasized the relationships among educational policy, teacher competence, pedagogical innovation, technological integration, and institutional adaptation. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how multiple factors interact in shaping the transformation of Arabic language learning within pesantren.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation and cross-study comparison were employed throughout the synthesis process. Findings from different studies were systematically compared to identify convergence, divergence, and emerging patterns. The exclusive use of peer-reviewed articles and internationally recognized databases further strengthened the credibility of the evidence base.

This review was limited to studies published between 2020 and 2025 and indexed in Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, or SINTA-indexed journals. Consequently, relevant studies published outside these databases may not have been captured. Furthermore, the thematic synthesis relied on the interpretation of published findings rather than primary empirical data, which may limit the depth of contextual insights available from individual pesantren settings.

RESULTS&DISCUSSION

Thematic content analysis of the 42 selected articles revealed that the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren is characterized by three major themes: government policy, teacher competence, and educational reform challenges. The findings indicate that educational transformation in pesantren is multidimensional, involving curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, teacher professional development, institutional adaptation, and the integration of digital technology. Therefore, the transformation of Arabic language learning should not merely be interpreted as technological modernization, but also as a systemic change in the governance and educational practices of pesantren institutions.

Table 1. Distribution of Articles by Publication Year

Year Number of Articles	
2020	4
2021	7
2022	9
2023	10
2024	8
2025	4

The distribution of publication years demonstrates that studies on the transformation of Arabic language learning in pesantren have increased significantly since 2022. This increase reflects growing academic attention toward curriculum reform, digital transformation, teacher competence development, and the modernization of Islamic education in the post-pandemic era. The trend also indicates that the transformation of

pesantren education has increasingly been viewed as a strategic issue in the development of contemporary Islamic education.

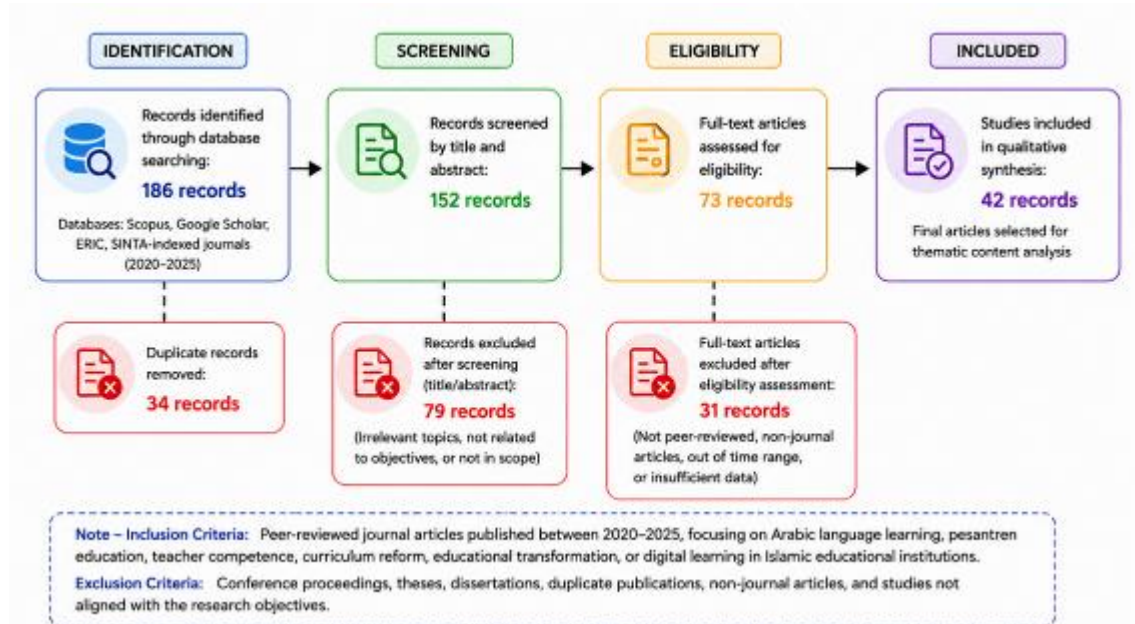


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for the Selection of Studies Included in the Review

As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial database search yielded 186 records. Following duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment, 42 studies were retained for thematic synthesis.

Table 2. Distribution of Research Themes in the Selected Articles

Research Theme	Articles	Main Focus
Teacher competence and professional development	16	Pedagogical competence, digital literacy, and adaptive learning
Digital transformation and technology integration	10	Digital learning, online platforms, and media utilization
Curriculum reform and pedagogical innovation	7	Communicative learning and student-centered learning
Government policy and educational transformation	5	Institutional modernization and educational policy
Reform challenges and institutional culture	4	Infrastructure, resistance to change, and institutional readiness

The findings indicate that teacher competence is the most frequently discussed theme in the reviewed literature. Of the 42 studies analyzed, a substantial proportion focused on pedagogical competence, digital literacy, professional development, and teachers' adaptive capacities in responding to educational transformation. Most studies emphasized that the success of Arabic language learning transformation is highly influenced by teachers' ability to adapt to pedagogical, curricular, and technological changes. These findings support teacher competence theory, which positions teachers as

the primary agents of educational transformation because they directly influence curriculum implementation and students' learning experiences (Halimah et al., 2024; Sidqi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the findings reveal that the transformation of Arabic language learning in pesantren cannot be separated from institutional readiness and the educational culture embedded within pesantren environments.

Table 3. Synthesis of Research Findings Based on Major Themes

Major Theme	Dominant Findings	Representative Articles
Government policy	Educational policies support the modernization and flexibility of pesantren learning systems	(Ali & Kawakip, 2025; Musa & Ghofur, 2026; Yahya, 2025)
Teacher competence	Pedagogical, professional, and digital competencies are the primary factors in educational transformation	(Musaddad & Sudarsono, 2025; Purwati & Sukirman, 2024; Sidqi et al., 2025)
Curriculum reform	Communicative and student-centered learning approaches are increasingly implemented	(Asy'ari & Firdaus, 2021; Nurwiati, 2022; Septianti et al., 2024)
Digital transformation	Technology integration has begun to be implemented, although unevenly	(Aulia et al., 2024; Burhanuddin, 2024b; Haq et al., 2024)
Institutional challenges	Cultural resistance and infrastructure limitations hinder educational reform	(Akhmad et al., 2023; Isbah, 2020; M. R. Rahman & Asrohah, 2022)

Government Policy and Educational Transformation

The analysis of the literature demonstrates that government policy plays a crucial role in promoting educational transformation in pesantren, particularly through institutional modernization, curriculum reform, teacher competence development, and the integration of learning technologies (Ali & Kawakip, 2025; Musa & Ghofur, 2026; Yahya, 2025). The implementation of Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren has strengthened the formal legitimacy of pesantren within the national education system while simultaneously opening opportunities for integrating modern education with Islamic educational traditions.

Several studies also revealed that the *Merdeka Belajar* policy encourages curriculum flexibility and the implementation of more adaptive and student-centered learning approaches (Asy'ari & Firdaus, 2021; Nurwiati, 2022; Septianti et al., 2024). In addition, educational digitalization programs have contributed to increased access to digital learning resources, the use of interactive learning media, and the development of technology-based teacher training (Burhanuddin, 2024b; Haq et al., 2024; Subekti et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the findings indicate that policy implementation has not been equally distributed across all pesantren institutions. Differences in institutional capacity, internet access, financial support, and human resource readiness have caused educational transformation to occur at varying levels of success. These findings suggest that

educational transformation is not solely determined by formal policies but is also influenced by institutional readiness in adapting to systemic educational change.

From the perspective of educational transformation theory, these findings demonstrate that educational reform requires policy support integrated with institutional strengthening and pedagogical innovation. Educational transformation in pesantren should therefore not be understood merely as digitalization, but rather as a structural transformation involving educational governance, curriculum flexibility, and adaptive learning culture (Halimah et al., 2024; Haq et al., 2024).

The reviewed studies indicate that government policies contribute to Arabic language learning transformation through several interconnected mechanisms. The formal recognition of pesantren strengthens institutional legitimacy and supports curriculum modernization. The Merdeka Belajar policy promotes greater curriculum flexibility and encourages student-centered learning practices. Meanwhile, digitalization programs facilitate technology integration in Arabic language instruction, while teacher development initiatives enhance professional competence and pedagogical innovation.

Teacher Competence in the Transformation of Arabic Language Learning

The analysis demonstrates that teacher competence is the most dominant factor influencing the success of Arabic language learning transformation in pesantren (Musaddad & Sudarsono, 2025; Purwati & Sukirman, 2024; Sidqi et al., 2025). The reviewed literature consistently emphasized that Arabic language teachers are required to possess multidimensional competencies, including pedagogical, professional, digital, socio-cultural, and curriculum adaptation competencies.

Several studies found that teachers with digital competence and innovative pedagogical skills were more capable of implementing communicative, collaborative, and interactive learning approaches compared to traditional grammar-based instructional methods (Faiz & Afrita, 2024; R. A. Rahman, 2025; Zuashfiyailina et al., 2025). These findings indicate that the transformation of Arabic language learning heavily depends on teachers' ability to integrate technology and modern learning strategies into pesantren educational practices.

From the perspective of teacher competence theory, these findings confirm that educational reform requires teachers' professional readiness and adaptive capacity. In the context of pesantren, teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as learning facilitators, educational innovators, and mediators between pesantren traditions and contemporary educational demands (Marzuki & Sudrajat, 2026; Sidqi et al., 2025).

Across the reviewed studies, teacher competence was consistently conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising pedagogical, professional, digital, curriculum-related, and socio-cultural dimensions. Pedagogical competence was associated with communicative and student-centered instruction, while professional competence referred to mastery of Arabic language content and instructional quality. Digital competence involved the effective use of technology and digital learning media, whereas curriculum competence concerned teachers' ability to adapt learning content to contextual needs.

Socio-cultural competence reflected teachers' understanding of pesantren traditions and students' characteristics within Islamic educational environments.

However, the literature also reveals significant competency gaps among pesantren teachers. Several studies reported that teachers still face difficulties integrating digital technology, developing interactive learning, and adapting to curriculum reform due to limited professional training and the persistence of conventional learning traditions (Aisyah et al., 2026; Fathoni, 2024; Mustofa & Makruf, 2025). These findings indicate that the availability of technology does not automatically produce effective learning transformation. Rather, successful transformation is more strongly determined by teachers' readiness to adapt to pedagogical and technological changes.

The findings are consistent with teacher competence theory, which emphasizes the multidimensional nature of professional teaching practice. For example, Sidqi et al. reported that competent Arabic language teachers in pesantren functioned not only as instructors but also as moral role models, cultural mediators, and facilitators of learning (Sidqi et al., 2025). Their ability to bridge traditional pesantren values with contemporary educational demands illustrates how teacher competence operates as a holistic construct integrating pedagogical, professional, social, and personal dimensions.

Reform Challenges and Institutional Adaptation

The literature analysis demonstrates that the major challenges of educational reform in pesantren include limited digital infrastructure, unequal internet access, low teacher digital literacy, resistance to pedagogical change, and institutional conservatism (Akhmad et al., 2023; Isbah, 2020; M. R. Rahman & Asrohah, 2022). Several studies revealed that traditional pesantren tend to maintain teacher-centered and grammar-based instructional approaches because they are considered more compatible with classical Islamic educational traditions.

Additional evidence regarding institutional adaptation was reported by Hanifa and Ali, who found that successful curriculum reform in pesantren requires comprehensive institutional transformation rather than isolated instructional changes. Their review emphasized the need for integrative curriculum development that combines Islamic values, general knowledge, and twenty-first-century competencies. The authors further highlighted that sustainable reform depends on continuous teacher training, adequate digital infrastructure, systematic curriculum evaluation, stakeholder collaboration, and the strengthening of digital literacy. These findings suggest that educational transformation in pesantren is constrained not only by individual teacher readiness but also by broader institutional capacities and organizational support systems. Therefore, reform implementation should be viewed as a holistic institutional process involving curriculum, human resources, infrastructure, and governance structures simultaneously (Hanifa & Ali, 2025).

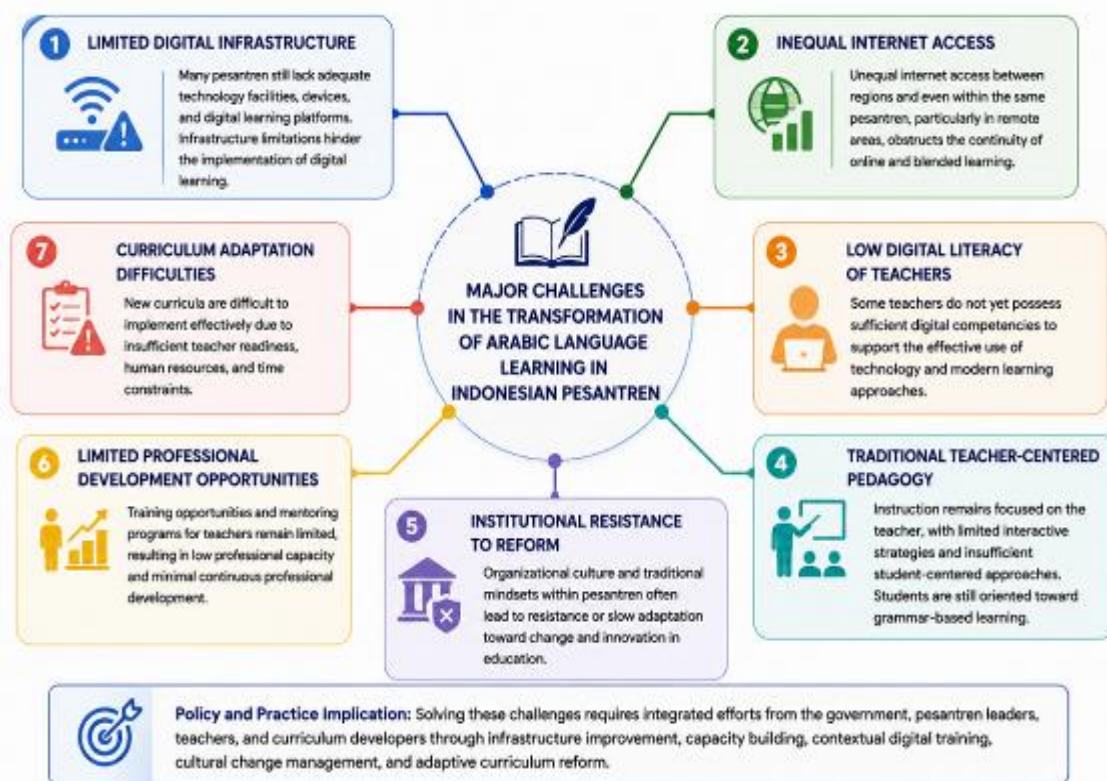


Figure 2. Major Challenges in the Transformation of Arabic Language Learning

The findings indicate that curriculum modernization without teacher readiness and institutional support often results in ineffective reform implementation. Therefore, the transformation of Arabic language learning requires alignment among curriculum reform, pedagogical strategies, assessment systems, and pesantren institutional culture (Alfulana et al., 2025; Hanani et al., 2024; Hanifa & Ali, 2025).

Furthermore, numerous studies emphasized the importance of collaboration among government institutions, pesantren leaders, curriculum developers, and teachers in supporting sustainable educational transformation. Continuous professional development, contextual digital training, infrastructure support, and curriculum flexibility were consistently identified as strategic solutions for transforming Arabic language learning in pesantren.

Contradictions and Divergent Findings in the Literature

Although the reviewed studies generally support the importance of digital transformation and teacher competence, several contradictory findings emerged across the literature. A number of studies reported that technology integration significantly enhanced students' engagement, communicative competence, and access to Arabic learning resources (Burhanuddin, 2024a; Haq et al., 2024). However, other studies found that the effectiveness of technology-based Arabic instruction remained limited due to inadequate teacher readiness and insufficient institutional support (Aisyah et al., 2026; Mustofa & Makruf, 2025).

A notable contradiction appears between large and well-resourced pesantren and smaller traditional pesantren. Several studies reported successful implementation of digital learning platforms in modern pesantren with adequate infrastructure and trained personnel. In contrast, studies conducted in smaller rural pesantren indicated that limited internet access, financial constraints, and resistance to pedagogical change continued to hinder digital transformation.

The literature also revealed differing perspectives regarding curriculum reform. While some studies viewed communicative and student-centered approaches as necessary adaptations to contemporary educational demands, others emphasized the importance of preserving traditional text-based learning methods as essential components of pesantren identity. These findings suggest that educational transformation in pesantren involves an ongoing negotiation between innovation and tradition rather than a linear process of modernization.

Theoretical Implications of Arabic Learning Transformation in Pesantren

This study contributes to the literature on educational transformation by extending existing theories of educational change within the context of Islamic boarding schools. Previous studies frequently conceptualized transformation as technological integration or digital innovation. In contrast, the findings of this review suggest that educational transformation in pesantren is a multidimensional process involving the interaction of policy reform, teacher competence, institutional culture, curriculum adaptation, and technological integration.

The findings partially support educational transformation theory by confirming the importance of institutional adaptation and innovation. However, the review also indicates that transformation in pesantren is shaped by the need to balance educational modernization with the preservation of religious and cultural traditions. Consequently, this study proposes that educational transformation in pesantren should be understood as an adaptive and negotiated process rather than a purely technological or managerial reform process.

Furthermore, the findings extend teacher competence theory by highlighting the importance of institutional and cultural factors that mediate the relationship between teacher competence and successful educational reform. Teacher competence alone is insufficient unless supported by organizational readiness and policy alignment.

This study has several limitations. First, the literature review only covered articles published between 2020 and 2025, thereby excluding earlier studies that may have contributed significantly to pesantren educational reform. Second, the study focused solely on journal articles indexed in selected databases, meaning that other local publications may not have been included. Third, the thematic analysis employed in this study was interpretative in nature; therefore, thematic classification depended heavily on the researcher's synthesis process, despite the implementation of source triangulation and cross-checking procedures.

Overall, this study confirms that the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren is a multidimensional process influenced by educational policy,

teacher competence, curriculum reform, technology integration, and institutional culture. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized digitalization, this study demonstrates that the success of educational transformation is more strongly determined by teacher readiness, institutional adaptability, and the overall alignment of the pesantren educational system. These findings reinforce the perspective that the transformation of Islamic education requires holistic, adaptive, and sustainable reform.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren through a systematic review with thematic synthesis of 42 peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025. The findings demonstrate that the transformation of Arabic language learning in pesantren is a multidimensional process involving the interaction of educational policy, teacher competence, curriculum reform, institutional adaptation, and digital technology integration. Rather than representing a purely technological shift, educational transformation in pesantren reflects broader efforts to align traditional Islamic educational values with contemporary educational demands.

The review identified three themes most frequently discussed in the literature: government policy, teacher competence, and reform challenges. Government initiatives, including the implementation of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, the Merdeka Belajar policy, and educational digitalization programs, have created opportunities for institutional modernization, curriculum flexibility, and the expansion of digital learning. However, the findings also reveal substantial disparities in implementation across pesantren due to differences in infrastructure availability, institutional readiness, financial resources, and access to technology. These findings suggest that policy support alone is insufficient unless accompanied by contextual institutional capacity-building.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends existing educational transformation literature by demonstrating that transformation in pesantren operates as an adaptive and negotiated process rather than a linear process of modernization. The findings indicate that successful educational change depends on the alignment among policy reform, teacher competence, institutional culture, and organizational readiness. In addition, the review expands teacher competence theory by showing that the impact of teacher competence is mediated by institutional and cultural factors. Consequently, educational transformation in pesantren should be understood as a systemic process in which individual, organizational, and policy dimensions interact simultaneously.

The findings further indicate that teacher competence is the theme most frequently discussed in the reviewed literature. Arabic language teachers are expected to possess pedagogical, professional, digital, socio-cultural, and curriculum adaptation competencies. Nevertheless, the review also highlights that teacher competence alone does not guarantee successful reform implementation. Sustainable transformation requires supportive institutional environments, continuous professional development, and curriculum structures that accommodate both educational innovation and pesantren traditions.

Several practical recommendations can be drawn from the findings. Arabic language learning in pesantren should be strengthened through the development of communicative and student-centered instructional models while maintaining the strengths of traditional Arabic scholarship. Teacher professional development programs should focus not only on digital literacy but also on curriculum adaptation, contextual pedagogy, and the integration of Arabic language instruction with pesantren learning culture. Furthermore, curriculum reform should be accompanied by institutional mentoring systems, sustainable evaluation mechanisms, and collaborative partnerships among pesantren, universities, and government agencies.

This study has several methodological limitations. First, the review was restricted to journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 and indexed in selected databases. Second, although systematic procedures were applied during article selection and thematic synthesis, the study did not conduct a formal critical appraisal of methodological quality across the included studies. Third, the review relied primarily on published literature, which may not fully capture the diversity of practices and experiences found in different pesantren contexts. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Future research should investigate how different types of pesantren (salafiyah, khalafiyah, and integrated models) respond to educational transformation initiatives, examine the relationship between institutional culture and teacher adaptation, and explore how curriculum reform influences Arabic language learning outcomes in diverse pesantren settings. More empirical field-based studies are also needed to validate and extend the findings generated through literature-based synthesis.

In conclusion, the transformation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian pesantren cannot be reduced to a question of technology adoption. Its success depends on the capacity of educational policies, teachers, curricula, and institutions to evolve in a balanced and context-sensitive manner while preserving the educational values that have long characterized the pesantren tradition. This study, therefore, reinforces the view that sustainable transformation in Islamic education requires holistic, adaptive, and institutionally grounded reform.

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