

AN INTEGRATIVE CURRICULUM MODEL FOR ARABIC INSTRUCTION INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL VALUES AND MODERN PEDAGOGIES PESANTREN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study aims to develop an integrative curriculum model for pure Arabic language instruction in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Traditionally, pesantren emphasize turāth-based instruction through methods such as sorogan and bandongan, fostering deep textual comprehension and scholarly dispositions. However, contemporary educational and societal demands necessitate the development of communicative, academic, and professional Arabic competencies. Employing a Design and Development Research (DDR) methodology, this study collected data from salaf, modern, and semi-modern pesantren through interviews, classroom observations, document analysis, and expert focus group discussions. The data were analyzed thematically and comparatively to examine existing curriculum structures, explore tensions and complementarities between traditional and modern pedagogical approaches, and identify points of convergence between turāth values and communicative, task-based language instruction. The resulting curriculum model delineates philosophical foundations, instructional objectives, content organization, learning strategies, assessment mechanisms, and the creation of an intentional Arabic language environment. Expert validation and limited field try-outs indicate that the proposed model is conceptually robust and practically feasible for gradual implementation, offering a contextually grounded framework for Arabic curriculum reform in pesantren settings.

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Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long played a central role in Arabic language education in Indonesia. Historically, Arabic instruction in pesantren has been closely linked to the study of classical Islamic texts (*turāth*), commonly known as *kitab kuning*. Traditional instructional methods—such as *sorogan*, *bandongan*, and *wetonan*—emphasize grammatical mastery, memorization, and close textual analysis, aiming to cultivate scholarly discipline, moral character, and continuity in the transmission of religious knowledge (Bruinessen, 1990; Zubaidi, 2015; Bisri, 2021). Within this tradition, Arabic primarily serves as a means of accessing religious sciences rather than a language for active communication.

In recent decades, however, the role of Arabic in pesantren has expanded. Graduates are increasingly expected to demonstrate communicative, academic, and professional Arabic competencies to engage with higher education, international scholarship, and transnational Islamic networks (Fatoni, 2019; Pane, 2018; Ni'am, 2022). At the same time, broader reforms in Islamic education—particularly in madrasah and Islamic schools—have promoted competency-based curricula, learner-centered pedagogies, and the integration of religious values with modern instructional designs and digital technologies (Fathoni, 2020; Lubis et al., 2022; Megandarisari, 2025). These developments place new demands on Arabic language instruction in pesantren.

This situation creates a pedagogical tension. On one side, traditional pesantren methods prioritize depth of understanding, repetition (*takrār*), and respect for authoritative texts and teachers, which are considered essential for preserving *turāth* and scholarly identity (Mustofa & Hamid, 2011; Pane, 2018). On the other side, contemporary language teaching approaches—such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)—emphasize meaningful interaction, learner autonomy, and communicative competence (Brown, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Balancing these two orientations remains a persistent challenge for pesantren-based Arabic education.

Recent empirical studies suggest that, although many pesantren formally adopt competency-based curricula and reference international proficiency frameworks, classroom practices often remain dominated by grammar-translation and teacher-centered instruction (Habibie et al., 2022). Modern and semi-modern pesantren have introduced structured language environments and imported curricula, such as those inspired by Middle Eastern institutions, yet these initiatives are not always supported by coherent curriculum models that fully reflect pesantren values and learning cultures (Wekke & Hamid, 2013; Wekke, 2014; Fidayani & Ammar, 2023). In salaf pesantren, concerns about weakening classical scholarship frequently limit the adoption of communicative and technology-mediated approaches (Bisri, 2021).

Existing research has contributed valuable insights into pesantren traditions, *kitab kuning* scholarship, Arabic teaching strategies, and the integration of local culture and technology in Islamic education (Bruinessen, 1990; Wekke, 2014; Muid et al., 2020; Idhan, Hasnah & Agustina, 2024). Other studies have examined curriculum transformation and value-based integration in madrasah and Islamic schools (Zubaidi,

2015; Ni'am, 2022; Megandarisari, 2025). However, these studies tend to address Arabic education either descriptively or as part of broader institutional reforms.

Several research gaps remain. First, Arabic curricula in pesantren are rarely developed as comprehensive models that explicitly connect philosophical foundations, learning objectives, content organization, pedagogy, assessment, and language environment. Second, integration efforts often focus on general Islamic education rather than on a pure Arabic language curriculum as a distinct domain of innovation. Third, few studies employ Design and Development Research (DDR) to systematically design, validate, and refine Arabic curriculum models grounded in pesantren contexts (Musfiqon, 2012; Jaya et al., 2021).

Responding to these gaps, the present study aims to design an integrative curriculum model for pure Arabic language instruction in Indonesian pesantren, preserving traditional values while incorporating evidence-based modern pedagogies and addressing contemporary competency demands. Specifically, this study aims to (1) examine existing Arabic curriculum practices in salaf, modern, and semi-modern pesantren; (2) identify tensions and convergence points between traditional and modern approaches; (3) develop an integrative curriculum model; and (4) evaluate its feasibility through expert judgment and limited field implementation.

By focusing explicitly on pure Arabic curriculum design and employing a DDR approach, this study contributes a contextually grounded and operationally viable framework for Arabic curriculum reform in pesantren. It is expected to enrich ongoing discussions on the integration of tradition and modernity in Arabic language education and to provide practical guidance for curriculum developers and educators in pesantren settings.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a Design and Development Research (DDR) approach. DDR is appropriate when the primary purpose of a study is to design, develop, and validate an educational product or model rather than to describe phenomena or test causal relationships (Musfiqon, 2012; Jaya et al., 2021). In this study, the product developed was an integrative curriculum model for pure Arabic language instruction in pesantren.

The DDR process was conducted through three interconnected phases. First, the exploration phase involved a needs analysis and field study to examine existing pure Arabic curricula and instructional practices in pesantren. This phase aimed to identify current approaches, challenges, and stakeholder expectations regarding Arabic instruction. Second, the model design phase synthesized findings from the exploration phase with relevant curriculum theory and second language pedagogy to develop a conceptual and operational draft of the curriculum model. The model specified key components, including philosophical foundations, instructional goals, content organization, teaching strategies, assessment procedures, and the Arabic language environment. Third, the validation and limited try-out phase involved

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expert review and small-scale implementation. Arabic curriculum experts and experienced pesantren practitioners evaluated the draft model, after which selected components were piloted in Arabic classes to assess initial feasibility and inform revisions.

Overall, DDR in this study followed an iterative logic in which empirical findings and theoretical perspectives continuously informed model refinement. Stakeholders were actively involved throughout the process, particularly during the exploration and validation phases. Fieldwork for this study was conducted in April 2025.

Research Sites and Participants

The study was conducted at two Islamic boarding schools in Bukittinggi, Indonesia: Pondok Pesantren Muhammadiyah Sawah Dangka and Pondok Pesantren Muhammadiyah Pakan Sinayan. These sites were purposively selected because they represent pesantren that actively develop Arabic instruction while facing common challenges related to integrating traditional and modern approaches.

A total of 100 participants were involved in the study. Participants were drawn from four stakeholder groups: (a) heads of pesantren, who provided institutional perspectives and policy directions; (b) curriculum developers, who were responsible for designing and managing Arabic programs; (c) Arabic language teachers, who implemented the curriculum in daily instruction; and (d) santri enrolled in intensive Arabic programs, who experienced the curriculum directly. Participants were treated as key informants and co-design contributors rather than as experimental subjects.

Data Collection

Data were collected using four complementary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with pesantren leaders, curriculum developers, and Arabic teachers to explore institutional goals, curriculum planning, and instructional experiences (Shidiq & Choiri, 2019). Second, participant and non-participant observations were carried out in Arabic classes and daily pesantren activities to document teaching practices, classroom interaction, and the Arabic language environment (bi'ah lughawiyah). Third, document analysis was used to examine syllabi, lesson plans, timetables, and textbooks in order to identify curriculum structure, sequencing, and stated learning objectives (Zubaidi, 2015; Rosyidi, 2017). Fourth, focus group discussions and Delphi-style consultations were conducted with Arabic curriculum experts and senior practitioners to obtain feedback on the proposed model, particularly during the validation and revision stages (Jaya et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through three main steps. First, thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to identify recurring themes related to curriculum structure, instructional practices, tensions, and

integration opportunities (Shidiq & Choiri, 2019). Second, comparative analysis was conducted to examine similarities and differences between the two pesantren, allowing the identification of context-specific and transferable elements of Arabic curriculum design. Third, design synthesis integrated empirical findings with established curriculum and language education frameworks, including Tyler's objective-based model, Taba's inductive curriculum development, Nation and Macalister's language curriculum design, and communicative and task-based language teaching principles (Tyler, 1949; Taba, 1962; Brown, 2007; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This synthesis guided iterative refinement of the curriculum model across DDR phases.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation of data sources, data collection methods, and theoretical perspectives (Musfiqon, 2012). Member checking was conducted with selected participants to confirm the accuracy and credibility of interpretations (Shidiq & Choiri, 2019). Ethical procedures included obtaining formal permission from pesantren authorities, securing informed consent from all participants, anonymizing institutional and individual identities, and respecting participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Results

Existing Structures of Pure Arabic Curricula

Document analysis indicates that Arabic curricula across the three pesantren comprise a combination of grammatical studies (nahw and şarf), rhetoric (balāghah), the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and classical text study using kitab kuning. In the salaf pesantren, the curriculum is strongly oriented toward turāth texts, characterized by dense instructional schedules and largely implicit lesson planning practices. In contrast, modern and semi-modern pesantren employ more formalized curricula, including written syllabi and lesson plans that explicitly state communicative learning outcomes.

Across all sites, Arabic learning extends beyond formal classes into non-formal and hidden curricula. Activities such as musyāwarah (collective text reading), designated language days, and informal Arabic use in dormitories contribute to language exposure. However, the Arabic language environment (bi'ah lughawiyah) is not consistently planned as an integral curriculum component and often depends on individual teacher initiative or student leadership rather than systematic design.

Traditional and Modern Teaching Methods in Practice

Classroom observations reveal varied applications of traditional and modern teaching methods. In the salaf pesantren, sorogan (individual reading to the teacher) and bandongan (teacher-led collective reading) dominate grammar instruction and

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classical text study. These methods support close textual engagement, strong teacher guidance, and learner discipline but provide limited opportunities for structured oral interaction and communicative language use.

In modern and semi-modern pesantren, traditional methods remain central for turāth instruction but are increasingly complemented by group discussions, role plays, presentations, and small-scale projects, particularly in speaking and writing courses. Teachers also employ basic educational technologies, such as instructional videos, messaging applications, and simple learning management systems. Nevertheless, the use of technology is not always aligned with curriculum objectives. Teachers reported challenges in implementing communicative and cooperative approaches, including large class sizes, diverse learner proficiency levels, and limited instructional time.

Points of Tension and Convergence

Interview data reveal perceived tensions between traditional values and modern pedagogical approaches. Some leaders and teachers expressed concern that communicative methods might reduce attention to grammatical rigor and weaken engagement with classical texts. Others viewed certain modern techniques as insufficiently serious and potentially incompatible with the discipline, humility, and respect traditionally cultivated in majlis learning settings.

Despite these concerns, the findings also reveal important points of convergence. The traditional practice of takrār (repetition) can be reinterpreted as structured drilling and spaced repetition within communicative tasks, such as repeated role plays or guided dialogues. Similarly, pesantren values related to sanad, adab, and spiritual intentionality can be embedded within project-based and task-based activities that incorporate ethical and devotional content. Overall, tensions appear to stem more from established habits and perceptions than from inherent incompatibility between traditional values and modern language pedagogy.

The Proposed Integrative Curriculum Model

Based on the synthesis of empirical findings and relevant theoretical frameworks, this study proposes an integrative pure Arabic curriculum model consisting of six interrelated components.

First, the philosophical foundation integrates divine values, pesantren turāth, and contemporary educational needs. Arabic mastery is positioned both as an act of worship and as a form of academic and professional competence.

Second, curricular goals are articulated through a graduate profile encompassing linguistic competence (grammar, morphology, rhetoric), communicative competence (four language skills), academic competence (engagement with scholarly Arabic texts and writing), and spiritual-ethical competence (adab in seeking knowledge).

Third, content is structured across basic, intermediate, and advanced levels, integrating turāth studies, language skills, and applied Arabic for academic and

professional purposes. Content selection and sequencing align curricular goals with learner needs and instructional progression.

Fourth, instructional strategies emphasize deliberate integration. Traditional methods (bandongan and sorogan) are retained for classical text study but are followed by comprehension checks and productive activities. Communicative and task-based approaches are applied in skills-focused courses, with tasks linked thematically to classical texts. Project-based, cooperative, and self-regulated learning strategies are gradually introduced.

Fifth, assessment combines traditional oral and written examinations for grammar and *turāth* with authentic assessments of communicative skills, including portfolios, projects, and performance-based tasks.

Sixth, the curriculum incorporates explicit planning for the Arabic language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*), including Arabic-only zones, language clubs, mentoring programs, and daily routines requiring Arabic use in academic and residential contexts.

These components are organized within an input-process-output framework, where learner characteristics and institutional vision serve as inputs, integrated curriculum components function as processes, and the desired pure Arabic competence profile represents the output.

Expert Validation and Limited Try-Out

Expert validation involving Arabic curriculum specialists and experienced pesantren practitioners indicated that the proposed model aligns with established curriculum theory, language curriculum design principles, and pesantren values. Experts considered the model conceptually coherent and practically feasible, particularly when implemented through phased introduction, targeted teacher development, and gradual timetable adjustments.

A limited try-out conducted in a speaking course demonstrated increased student participation, more frequent use of Arabic during classroom interaction, and positive perceptions among both teachers and learners. Participants reported that the integration of classical text engagement with communicative tasks was both achievable and pedagogically beneficial.

To synthesize the findings of this study, a visual mapping was developed to represent the key themes emerging from document analysis, observations, interviews, and expert validation. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships among existing Arabic curriculum structures in pesantren, prevailing teaching methods, identified tensions and convergence points between traditional and modern approaches, and the proposed integrative curriculum model. The diagram also incorporates validation outcomes and implementation considerations, highlighting how empirical findings informed the design of a coherent, contextually grounded curriculum framework. This visual representation serves to clarify the logic of integration and the interconnections among curriculum components discussed in the preceding results.

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Figure 1. Illustrates the relationships among existing Arabic curriculum structures in pesantren

Discussion

Positioning the Model Within Curriculum and Second Language Theory

The proposed integrative curriculum model demonstrates that classical curriculum frameworks remain relevant when interpreted within specific educational and cultural contexts. Tyler's objective-oriented framework and Taba's inductive curriculum development model provide a systematic structure for aligning philosophical foundations, curricular goals, instructional content, pedagogical strategies, and assessment practices in pesantren-based Arabic education (Tyler, 1949; Taba, 1962). These frameworks support the development of a coherent curriculum architecture that connects values, structure, and classroom practice. In addition, Nation and Macalister's (2010) language curriculum design model contributes a principled approach for linking needs analysis and contextual constraints to decisions about goals, input, and sequencing.

From a second language acquisition perspective, the integration of turāth texts with communicative and task-based activities operationalizes the input–interaction–output cycle in ways that remain faithful to pesantren traditions while addressing contemporary communicative demands (Brown, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Classical texts serve as linguistically and conceptually rich input, while tasks, projects, and interactive activities create structured opportunities for learner interaction and meaningful language output. This integration addresses a key limitation of purely traditional instruction, in which opportunities for active language use are often limited.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study support the view that the perceived dichotomy between tradition and modernity in Islamic education is frequently overstated. When embedded within a coherent curriculum framework, traditional pesantren values—such as turāth, sanad, and adab—can coexist productively with modern pedagogical approaches, including communicative and task-based language teaching (Zubaidi, 2015; Lubis et al., 2022). Rather than weakening classical scholarship, modern pedagogies can function as complementary mechanisms for deepening comprehension and extending the functional use of Arabic.

This study also extends existing scholarship on integrated Islamic curricula by foregrounding pure Arabic language instruction as a distinct and strategic site of integration, rather than treating Arabic as a subsidiary component of broader Islamic education reform (Fathoni, 2020; Megandarisari, 2025). Conceptually, the model provides a foundation for future theorization on localized L2 curriculum design in religious education contexts, particularly in environments characterized by strong textual traditions.

Practical and Policy Implications

At the practical level, the model offers pesantren leaders a structured pathway for Arabic curriculum reform that does not require abandoning turāth-based instruction. A phased implementation approach—beginning with pilot classes, targeted teacher professional development, and gradual timetable adjustments—can reduce resistance to change while fostering sustainable innovation. Such an approach aligns with pesantren organizational cultures that prioritize continuity and collective agreement.

For Arabic teachers, the model provides concrete pedagogical guidance for integrating classical text study with communicative, task-based, and project-oriented activities. It also encourages the use of diversified assessment strategies that balance traditional examinations with authentic evaluations of communicative competence (Mustofa & Hamid, 2011; Mustofa, 2017; Ridho, 2018).

At the policy level, the model has potential implications for internal quality assurance systems within pesantren and for the development of reference standards for pure Arabic curricula at institutional, organizational, and national levels. It may contribute to ongoing efforts to harmonize pesantren-based education with broader competency frameworks while preserving institutional autonomy and identity (Lubis et al., 2022; Ni'am, 2022).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a limited number of pesantren within a single national context, which restricts the generalizability of the findings across the diverse landscape of pesantren typologies (Bruinessen, 1990; Bisri, 2021). Second, the limited try-out phase focused on feasibility and perception rather than on longitudinal measurement of

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language proficiency or controlled comparisons with alternative curriculum models (Jaya et al., 2021).

Future research is therefore recommended to (a) employ quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs to examine the impact of the model on learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiency; (b) implement and adapt the model across a wider range of pesantren and regional contexts to investigate scalability and contextual variation; and (c) develop and empirically test textbooks, instructional materials, and digital resources explicitly aligned with the integrative curriculum model (Wekke & Hamid, 2013; Rosyidi, 2017).

To clarify the analytical structure of the discussion, a conceptual map was developed to synthesize the theoretical positioning, implications, limitations, and future directions of the proposed integrative Arabic curriculum model. Figure 2 visualizes how the model is situated within curriculum theory and second language acquisition frameworks, how it informs theoretical, practical, and policy implications, and how identified limitations lead to specific directions for future research and innovation. The figure highlights the complementary relationship between tradition and modernity and illustrates the broader contribution of the study to Arabic curriculum research in pesantren contexts.

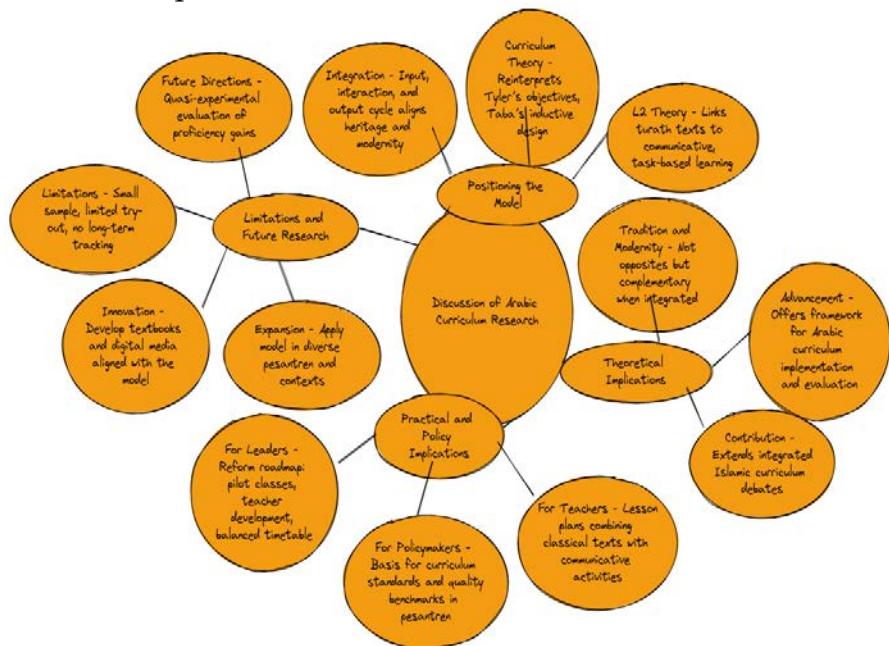


Figure 2. Visualizes how the model is situated within curriculum theory

Conclusion

This study addresses the need for a coherent and contextually grounded integrative curriculum model for pure Arabic language instruction in Indonesian pesantren. Employing a Design and Development Research approach informed by fieldwork across multiple pesantren and expert validation, the study identified existing curricular structures and instructional practices, as well as key tensions and convergence points between traditional values and modern pedagogical approaches.

Based on these findings, a systematically articulated curriculum model was developed.

The proposed model integrates *turāth* with contemporary educational demands by establishing clear philosophical foundations and comprehensive curricular goals encompassing linguistic, communicative, academic, and spiritual-ethical competencies. It organizes content progressively across instructional levels, integrates traditional and modern teaching strategies, combines conventional and authentic assessment methods, and intentionally designs an Arabic language environment. Expert review and limited implementation indicate that the model is conceptually sound and practically feasible, particularly when introduced through phased implementation supported by targeted teacher development and institutional commitment.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically to ongoing discussions on curriculum integration in Arabic language education and offers a practical framework for curriculum reform in pesantren contexts. At the same time, it highlights the need for further empirical research to examine the model's long-term effectiveness, adaptability, and scalability across diverse pesantren settings.

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