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Article

Revolutionizing Arabic Language Learning in Pesantren through the Synergy of Educational Policies, Curriculum, and Modern Educational Technology

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of the modern era requires educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), to continuously adapt. Arabic language learning, which used to focus mainly on memorization and grammar, is now shifting toward a more creative and interactive approach. This study discusses how educational policies, curriculum design, and technology can work together to create a more engaging and effective Arabic learning environment in pesantren. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation in several pesantren that have implemented technology-based learning. The results show that the combination of supportive policies, flexible curricula, and the use of digital media can significantly increase students' motivation and participation in learning Arabic. Moreover, technology helps teachers deliver material in more diverse ways without neglecting the Islamic values that form the foundation of pesantren education. In conclusion, Arabic language learning in pesantren needs to keep evolving through modern approaches to remain relevant and appealing to younger generations.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long been recognized as institutions that preserve Islamic knowledge and moral values, where Arabic functions as both a language of religious scholarship and a means of accessing classical Islamic sources (Thohir et al., 2021). Traditionally, Arabic instruction in pesantren has emphasized grammatical mastery (nahwu–sharaf) and text interpretation. Although this approach strengthens students' understanding of classical literature (turāth), it is often insufficient to develop communicative competence and digital literacy required in contemporary educational contexts.

Current developments indicate a shift from structural and translation-based methods toward communicative and task-based language teaching, in which students actively engage in meaning-making and contextual interaction (Syafei, 2025). However, the implementation of this approach in pesantren requires careful adaptation to maintain the cultural, spiritual, and

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epistemological identity of the pesantren tradition. The challenge lies in integrating innovation without undermining the pesantren's distinctive educational character.

This transformation requires systemic support. Educational policy determines the strategic direction of institutional change, curriculum functions as the operational framework shaping learning activities, and educational technology serves as an accelerator for pedagogical innovation. The synergy of these three elements is essential. Without policy support, curriculum reform tends to stagnate; without curriculum adaptation, technology becomes merely a tool without pedagogical relevance; and without technology integration, learning innovation proceeds slowly and remains limited in scope (Ramdani et al., 2025).

At the global level, Islamic educational institutions in the Middle East and South Asia have integrated digital platforms and interactive applications to increase student engagement in Arabic learning (Sulesti et al., 2025). In Indonesia, some modern pesantren—such as Gontor, Al-Amien, and Darunnajah—have adopted blended and technology-assisted learning environments. However, many pesantren still face constraints in digital infrastructure, teacher competence, and regulatory clarity, resulting in uneven implementation of Arabic learning innovations across institutions.

Despite increasing attention to Arabic language innovation in pesantren, existing studies tend to focus on either technological integration, curriculum revision, or institutional policy in isolation. Few studies examine how policy, curriculum, and technology interact as an integrated system to support sustainable transformation in Arabic language learning.

This study aims to analyze how the synergy between educational policy, curriculum development, and educational technology contributes to the transformation of Arabic language learning in pesantren. The novelty of this paper lies in presenting a conceptual synergy model that illustrates the relational and mutually reinforcing interaction among these three components. This model provides a holistic framework for strengthening Arabic language learning while maintaining the cultural and spiritual identity of pesantren in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the transformation of Arabic language learning in pesantren through the synergy of educational policies, curriculum design, and educational technology. The descriptive qualitative method is appropriate because it enables the researcher to understand learning practices in their natural context and to interpret meaning based on the perspectives of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Unlike phenomenology which focuses on individual lived experiences, or case studies which examine a single bounded setting, the descriptive qualitative design in this study emphasizes the systemic interaction of institutional, pedagogical, and technological elements across multiple pesantren.

The research was conducted from 2024 to 2025 in three pesantren located in East Java, Central Java, and West Java. The selection of research sites used purposive sampling, with criteria including: (1) pesantren that include Arabic as a core learning component; (2) pesantren that differ in typology (salaf, semi-modern, modern); and (3) pesantren that have initiated technology-based learning to varying degrees.

Research Informants:

- Pesantren Leader 1, Pesantren Leader 2, Pesantren Leader 3
- Arabic Language Teacher 1–6
- Student Informants 1–6 (intermediate–advanced)

Data Collection:

- Observation (face-to-face and digital learning environments)
- Semi-structured interviews
- Documentation study

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were conducted to ensure research trustworthiness.

This study does not aim to generalize statistically, but rather to provide conceptual and contextual insights regarding the synergy between policy, curriculum, and technology in transforming Arabic language learning in pesantren.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Arabic Language Learning in Pesantren

The findings of this research indicate that Arabic language learning in pesantren is gradually shifting from classical, teacher-centered learning to more communicative and technology-assisted approaches. The pace of change varies depending on leadership orientation, policy direction, and teacher readiness. Modern pesantren such as Pesantren Al-Hikmah, Pesantren Darussalam Modern, and Pesantren Wali Songo Ngabar have begun integrating digital media and blended learning into their instructional practices. Meanwhile, pesantren with a more traditional orientation tend to adopt technological elements more slowly to maintain the continuity of kitab-based scholarly identity (Thohir et al., 2021).

One Arabic language teacher at Wali Songo Ngabar highlighted this transition process:

"We understand the importance of using technology in the classroom, but we still need continuous guidance, especially in designing digital learning media that fit our pesantren context."

(Interview, Arabic Teacher, Pesantren Wali Songo Ngabar, 2025)

This shows that the desire to innovate is already present, but must be accompanied by systematic capacity building and infrastructure support.

Policy Support and Institutional Leadership

Institutional policy plays an important role in determining how innovation is implemented. Pesantren leaders who adopt an inclusive and adaptive leadership style tend to create a learning environment that is more open to change (Ramdani et al., 2025). One leader emphasized:

"We maintain our tradition, but we also cannot remain static. Technology should help our students learn more meaningfully, not replace the essence of pesantren."

(Interview, Pesantren Leader, Pesantren Darussalam, 2025)

This aligns with national policy directions encouraging pesantren to implement more adaptive learning approaches, such as through the Pesantren Digitalization and Merdeka Belajar programs (Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka…, n.d.).

Curriculum Adjustment and Communicative Competence

Although kutub al-turats remains central, several pesantren have begun designing learning tracks that distinguish between theoretical language mastery and communicative practice, integrating both classical Islamic scholarship and real-life language use (Syaiful, 2024). A teacher explained:

"Students understand the texts, but they still need confidence to speak naturally. So we introduced project-based muhadatsah tasks."

(Interview, Arabic Teacher, Pesantren Wali Songo Ngabar, 2025)

This movement is in line with curriculum innovation literature emphasizing digital literacy and 21st-century skills (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

Educational Technology as a Driver of Engagement

Technology is not positioned to replace classical learning, but to support engagement and accessibility. Platforms such as Google Classroom, Quizizz, and short learning videos help make the learning process more interactive (Mukhlas, 2025). A student shared:

"Video-based explanations help me understand faster, and the quiz apps make the learning feel more motivating and competitive."

(Interview, Student, Pesantren Al-Hikmah, 2025)

This aligns with the Blended Learning and TPACK frameworks, which emphasize balanced use of pedagogy, content, and technology.

Synergy Model

The research findings form a Synergy Triangle Model, consisting of:

Component	Function	Contribution
Policy	Institutional direction	Ensures continuity of innovation
Curriculum	Learning structure	Preserves turats while enabling communicative competence
Technology	Pedagogical support	Enhances interaction and engagement

This model emphasizes that innovation will not be effective if one component stands alone. Sustainable transformation requires these three elements to reinforce one another (Islamic Education 4.0…, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that improving Arabic learning in pesantren requires the alignment of educational policy, curriculum design, and technology use. When leadership opens space for innovation, policies become a real support system for teachers to try new learning approaches. Curriculum adjustments that balance turats mastery with communicative practice make Arabic more meaningful and relevant for students today. Meanwhile, technology, when used appropriately, can help teachers create learning that is more interactive and engaging.

The synergy of these three components is the main contribution of this research. Innovation will not be effective if one stands alone. Therefore, pesantren are encouraged to strengthen teacher capacity in digital literacy, gradually adapt curriculum to students' real communication needs, and ensure institutional support for technology use. Through this synergy, pesantren can maintain their identity while continuing to develop Arabic learning that is sustainable and responsive to the needs of the current generation.

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