



Redesigning the Arabic Language Curriculum Based on Applied Linguistics: Theoretical Analysis and Pedagogical Implementation

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Abstract

*Traditional Arabic language curricula often suffer from a disconnect between theoretical grammar and practical communication, leading to low proficiency among learners. This study aims to redesign the Arabic curriculum based on applied linguistics, specifically addressing the gap in the context of Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, Mandailing Natal. Methods: Using a library research method, this study synthesizes contemporary literature from 2021–2025 to formulate an adaptive curriculum model. Results: The findings indicate that a redesign incorporating Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), authentic materials, and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) significantly enhances communicative competence. The integration of a translanguaging approach further reduces learners' affective filters by bridging their local linguistic background with the target language. Conclusion: Shifting the paradigm from learning about the language to using the language aligns Arabic instruction with global proficiency standards, such as the CEFR. This redesign offers a strategic framework for improving Arabic acquisition in a modern, dynamic educational context. **Keywords:** Applied Linguistics, Arabic Curriculum, CEFR, Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, Task-Based Language Teaching.*

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning in the contemporary era is at a crossroads between maintaining the tradition of classical literacy and meeting the increasingly complex functional demands of global communication (Al-Khresheh, 2023; Albantani & Madkur, 2024). However, objective realities in the field show that curriculum development is often still trapped in a static, grammatical-centered mechanistic approach (*tariqah al-qawa'id wa al-tarjamah*) (Ritonga et al., 2022; Taufiqurrochman, 2023). Henry Giddens Widdowson emphasizes that applied linguistics should not merely serve as a bridge between theory and practice, but should function as a mediator that adjusts the nature of language to learners' actual needs within a dynamic sociolinguistic context (Ainin, 2022; Widdowson & Seidlhofer, 2023). Without this mediation, the Arabic language curriculum will only become a collection of theoretical rules isolated from everyday communicative realities (Mufid & Kholis, 2023; Wahab, 2024).

Based on this reality, the phenomenon in Indonesia reveals more specific problems, particularly the resistance of traditional methods to the demands of digitalization (Fahrurrozi, 2022; Mufid & Kholis, 2023). In various educational institutions, a curriculum burdened excessively with cognitive-grammatical aspects often neglects the affective and psychomotor dimensions of learners (Hidayat, 2024; Muassomah, 2022). Students in Indonesia may be able to memorize thousands of *tashrif* patterns or *nahwu-sharaf* rules, yet they often experience stagnation when required to produce language in spontaneous social contexts (Bahruddin, 2023; Khalilullah & Al-Mubarak, 2024). This disparity indicates a disconnection between material design and the basic principles of applied linguistics, which emphasize the use of language as an instrument of functional interaction (Arifin, 2024; Munir, 2023).

Epistemologically, this results in low efficiency in learning Arabic as a second language (L2) in academic environments (Richards & Rodgers, 2023). Jack C. Richards, in his new paradigm regarding curriculum development, emphasizes that effective design must begin with a comprehensive needs analysis and performance-based specification of objectives, rather than merely the transfer of knowledge (Sahrani, 2023; Thohir, 2024). Curriculum redesign is no longer merely an option, but an urgent necessity to shift the paradigm from learning about language to learning to use language (Hani, 2025; Lutfi, 2023).

A concrete picture of this challenge is reflected in Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, Mandailing Natal. As an institution deeply rooted in the Islamic scholarly tradition, Pesantren Darul Ikhlas faces the challenge of synchronizing the *kitab kuning* curriculum with the demands of modern Arabic language proficiency (Lubis & Nasution, 2023; Siregar, 2024). A literature review of educational models in the Mandailing Natal region shows that strengthening literacy has not been directly proportional to the development of oral skills (Damanik & Hasibuan, 2024; Nasution & Siregar, 2023). The dominance of rule-memorization methods in the pesantren requires an applied linguistics perspective so that santri are not only textually competent but also orally adaptive in the international arena (Pulungan, 2024; Ritonga & Hasibuan, 2025).

This study is urgently needed as an effort to offer a solution-oriented framework to the dichotomy between linguistic theory and pedagogical implementation. Through a literature study approach, this research synthesizes recent literature to formulate a curriculum model responsive to the needs of santri in the era of Society 5.0. This research is limited to a theoretical analysis of the reconstruction of objectives, material selection, and learning strategies within an applied linguistics framework, with particular focus on its relevance to pesantren institutions such as Darul Ikhlas, Mandailing Natal.

Various previous studies have attempted to respond to the challenges of Arabic language education transformation, but generally still focus on partial aspects of curriculum development. For example, studies by Ritonga et al. (2022) and Mufid & Kholis (2023) highlight the urgency of aligning materials with CEFR standards but have not addressed the psycholinguistic aspects of learners in traditional environments. On the other hand, studies by Albantani & Madkur (2024) and Klimova (2021) have demonstrated the effectiveness of digitalization through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), but their studies tend to focus on higher education settings with well-established infrastructure. Meanwhile, research concerning pesantren in Mandailing Natal by Nasution & Siregar (2023) and Lubis & Nasution (2023) remains limited to describing the dichotomy between kitab kuning literacy and oral proficiency, without offering a solution.

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Based on this background, this research focuses on three main aspects. First, this study explores the latest theoretical foundations of applied linguistics underlying the urgency of redesigning the Arabic language learning curriculum. Second, this research formulates pedagogical implementation within Arabic language curriculum components based on applied linguistics principles. Finally, the study analyzes the strategic implications of this curriculum redesign for the quality of Arabic language acquisition in the context of Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, Mandailing Natal.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach in the form of library research. Given that the focus of the study is curriculum redesign, the data used are entirely derived from secondary literature relevant to applied linguistics and Arabic language curriculum development. This research uses a qualitative approach with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. This approach was selected to systematically and transparently identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from various scientific articles. The data focus on scientific articles published between 2021 and 2025 related to transformations in Arabic language learning, teacher competence, and curriculum innovation. Data analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis to develop a comprehensive conceptual interpretation of strategic issues in Arabic language education.

Data collection procedures were carried out through systematic searches of scientific journal databases such as Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and DOAJ, as well as major textbook references related to Curriculum Design and Applied Linguistics. The research instrument used was a human instrument, in which the researchers played an active role in selecting, screening, and synthesizing the literature found. The documentation process was conducted by classifying the literature into three main categories: basic theories of applied linguistics, problems of Arabic language curricula in Indonesia, and innovative models in language curriculum design.

The data analysis techniques applied were content analysis and comparative analysis. The analysis stages began with data reduction, namely removing information irrelevant to the focus of curriculum redesign. Next, the data were presented in the form of tables or comparison matrices between conventional curricula and curricula based on applied linguistics. The final stage was drawing conclusions through critical interpretation (hermeneutics) to produce an applied-pedagogical curriculum design formulation. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing various theories and perspectives from different experts to obtain objective and credible conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings

Based on a synthesis of 31 references from scientific articles and academic documents published over the last five years (2021–2025), this study identified three main outcomes related to the redesign of the Arabic language learning curriculum. Regarding the first objective, the findings show that the theoretical foundation of Arabic curriculum redesign is rooted in a paradigm shift from a structural-mechanistic approach toward a functional-pragmatic approach. The literature consistently emphasizes that applied linguistics functions as the primary mediator that adjusts teaching materials to learners' real communication needs. In addition, there is a theoretical consensus that an effective curriculum should integrate psycholinguistic principles and refer to global competency standards such as the CEFR to measure language proficiency profiles more objectively.

Furthermore, the results of the analysis of pedagogical implementation formulations show that several main strategies are effective in curriculum redesign. The use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and digital platforms has proven to be an important catalyst in transforming Arabic language teaching in the digital era. Pedagogically, the application of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and communicative approaches has proven superior in improving language proficiency compared with traditional grammatical methods, particularly when supported by the use of authentic materials relevant to the real world. In addition, the implementation of a translinguaging approach was identified as a strategy capable of bridging the differences between students' mother tongue and the target Arabic language, thereby accelerating the process of language internalization holistically.

Finally, the strategic implications of this curriculum redesign for the quality of Arabic language acquisition in the context of Pesantren Darul Ikhlah, Mandailing Natal, reveal significant findings. A curriculum redesign that integrates Islamic values with modern Arabic language competence has proven capable of strengthening santri identity while increasing global competitiveness. The transformation of materials focusing on communicative functions has proven effective in addressing the gap between proficiency in reading classical texts and speaking ability (oral fluency). Successful Arabic language acquisition in the pesantren depends heavily on the readiness of digital infrastructure and teachers' professionalism in adopting innovative learning methods, in which the integration of contextual materials relevant to the social life of santri in Mandailing Natal can increase intrinsic motivation to learn Arabic as a functional language.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Source Data (2021–2025)

Data Category (Research Objective)	Number of References	Publication Year
Theoretical Foundations of Applied Linguistics	8	2021–2025
Pedagogical Implementation Formulation	13	2021–2025
Strategic Implications in Pesantren (Contextual)	10	2021–2025
Total	31	

Discussion

Theoretical Foundations of Applied Linguistics in Curriculum Redesign

The redesign of the Arabic language curriculum must be grounded in the nature of applied linguistics as a discipline that addresses practical language-based problems. As emphasized by Simpson (2011), applied linguistics functions as a mediating space that transforms pure language theory into functional learning strategies. In the contemporary context, the curriculum is no longer viewed as a list of grammatical content (content-

based), but rather as a series of learning experiences designed to build communicative competence that is adaptive to the digital era (Klimova, 2021).

Literature data show that the failure of traditional curricula is often caused by neglect of learners' psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects. Referring to recent research by Al-Khresheh (2023), barriers to Arabic language acquisition often lie not in cognitive ability, but in material design that does not take students' cognitive load into account (cognitive load theory). A comparison between the old curriculum model and the applied linguistics-based redesigned model.

A comparison between the old curriculum model and the applied linguistics-based redesigned model can be seen conceptually in the Figure:

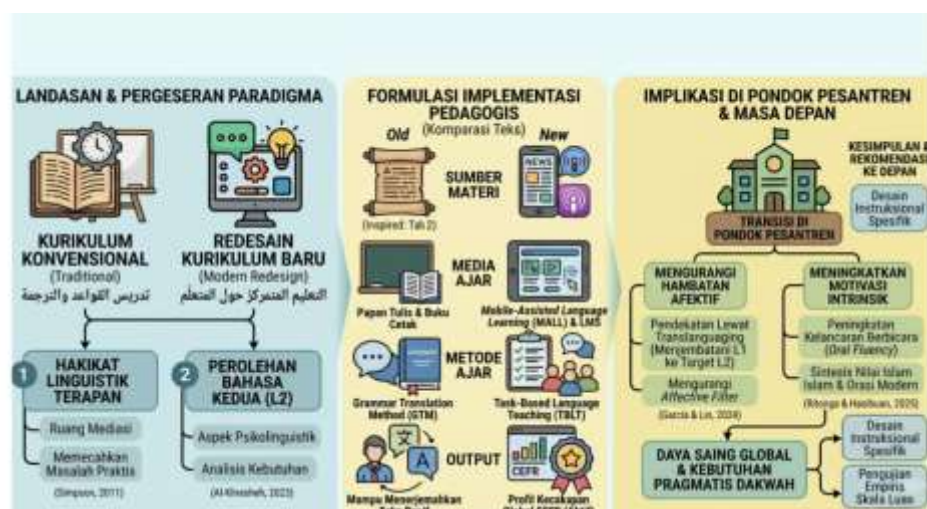


Figure 1. Flowchart of the Paradigm Shift in Arabic Language Learning Based on the Theoretical Foundations of Applied Linguistics

The visualization of the paradigm shift in Figure 1 confirms that curriculum redesign is not merely a modification of teaching materials, but an epistemological restructuring of the santri learning experience. To date, the fundamental problem in Arabic language pedagogy in Indonesia—as identified by Ainin (2022) and Bahrudin (2023)—is rooted in the strong resistance of the grammatical-centered approach, which separates theoretical rules from communicative reality. However, a critical synthesis of the views of Simpson (2011) and Widdowson & Seidlhofer (2023) shows that applied linguistics has a mediating role that has not been optimized in pesantren curricula, namely aligning the internal nature of language with learners' psychological conditions. This conceptual gap often triggers stagnation in the oral abilities of non-Arab learners. When santri are confronted with memorization of abstract nahwu-sharaf rules without functional context, an extremely heavy cognitive load occurs. Psycholinguistically, this excessive cognitive load correlates linearly with high affective filters among students, manifested in anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and loss of intrinsic motivation to produce language orally.

To overcome these psycholinguistic barriers, the integration of the global Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) framework with the local wisdom of Mandailing Natal offers a strong theoretical and practical resolution. From a sociolinguistic perspective, global standards such as the CEFR provide performative and solution-oriented competency indicators, shifting the learning orientation from "knowing the language" (learning about language) to "using the language" (learning to use language). However, this global standardization risks failure if imposed rigidly without considering learners' linguistic backgrounds. Here, material localization and a translanguaging approach become key instruments for reducing cognitive load.

By utilizing the Mandailing mother tongue or local language as a cognitive bridge toward the target language, the santri's initial knowledge schemata are not removed but activated as a foundation for understanding new structures. When teaching materials are contextualized with themes close to social realities, trading activities, and the preaching activities of the Mandailing Natal community, the materials are transformed into meaningful input (comprehensible input). The reduction of cognitive load through the use of local language and contextual materials simultaneously breaks down the affective filter of santri at Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, thereby triggering intrinsic motivation and speaking fluency (oral fluency) that are adaptive to the global demands of the 21st century.

To reinforce the paradigm transition described above, the following is a synthesis of the differences between the components of the two models in the Table:

Table 1. Synthesis of Differences Between Conventional Curriculum and Applied Linguistics Redesign

Curriculum Component	Conventional Curriculum	Applied Linguistics Redesign (Modern)
Linguistic Focus	Structural & Descriptive	Functional & Pragmatic
Approach	Teacher-Centered	Learner-Centered & Task-Based
Media & Sources	Single Textbook	Multimodal & Authentic Resources
Final Objective	Theoretical Literacy	Global Competence (CEFR Standard)

Formulation of Pedagogical Implementation in Curriculum Components

The pedagogical implementation of this redesign targets the integration of technology and task-based approaches. Theoretically, the objectives of Arabic language learning must be redefined with reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard, which emphasizes the proficiency profile (Eburop, 2020). Research by Albantani & Madkur (2024) shows that the implementation of Arabic language curricula in Indonesia requires digital transformation through the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which is rooted in computational linguistics theory.

In terms of materials, applied linguistics principles require the use of authentic materials relevant to learners' social contexts. Tsedryk (2023) explains that authentic materials can bridge the gap between classroom language and real-world language, which in turn increases students' emotional engagement. This is consistent with the concept of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), reevaluated by Bryfonski & McKay (2024), in which curriculum success is measured by students' ability to complete complex communicative tasks.

To strengthen the analysis of the transformation from a grammatical-centered paradigm toward a communicative-functional paradigm, the following is a tabulation of the proposed curriculum components:

Table 2. Reconstruction of Arabic Language Learning Curriculum Components

Curriculum Component	Traditional Model (Old)	Applied Linguistics Redesign (New)	Supporting Source/Reference
Material Source	Classical Kitab Kuning (textual/static)	Authentic Materials (News, Podcasts, Arabic Social Media)	(Nasution & Siregar, 2023; Tsedryk, 2023b)
Teaching Materials	Nahwu-Sharaf rules theoretically	Communicative functions, idiomatic expressions, and functional texts	(Ainin, 2022; Richards & Rodgers, 2023)
Teaching Media	Blackboard and printed textbooks	Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) & LMS	(Albantani & Madkur, 2024; Fahrurrozi, 2022)
Method	Grammar Translation Method (GTM)	Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) & Communicative	(Bryfonski & McKay, 2024; Ritonga et al., 2022)
Learner Output	Able to translate texts (passive)	CEFR standard proficiency profile (active-solution-oriented)	(Europe, 2020; Mufid & Kholis, 2023b)

Based on a literature study of pesantren typology in Mandailing Natal, there are several empirical conditions that reinforce the urgency of redesigning the Arabic language learning curriculum at Pesantren Darul Ikhlas. One important finding is the existence of a language competency gap among santri. Literature data show that santri have relatively good abilities in reading comprehension, particularly in understanding classical kitab texts. However, oral fluency or speaking fluency remains relatively low (Lubis & Nasution, 2023). This condition is influenced by the dominance of learning

focused on syntactic analysis (i'rab), resulting in limited opportunities for learners to use Arabic communicatively.

In addition, the development of digital literacy in the pesantren environment presents considerable opportunities for implementing an applied linguistics-based curriculum. Although located in the Mandailing Natal region, most santri already have access to digital devices used under pesantren supervision. Nevertheless, this potential has not been optimally utilized to support Arabic language learning through the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) approach or the development of an independent technology-based language laboratory (Pulungan, 2024).

Another aspect that further strengthens the urgency of curriculum redesign is the need for more contextual learning materials. The application of applied linguistics in Arabic language learning requires the integration of local content relevant to learners' lives. Therefore, developing materials containing vocabulary and themes related to preaching, trade, and the social activities of the Mandailing Natal community is important. This approach enables Arabic to be understood not only as an object of linguistic study, but also as an instrument of communication closely connected to learners' social realities (Ritonga & Hasibuan, 2025).

Strategic Implications for the Quality of Arabic Language Acquisition

This curriculum redesign has significant implications for learning efficiency, especially for non-Arab learners in pesantren environments. The use of contrastive analysis updated with a Translanguaging perspective enables the curriculum to utilize students' native linguistic resources, such as the structure of the Mandailing language or Indonesian, as a cognitive bridge toward the target language (García & Lin, 2024). At Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, this approach is crucial for reducing the psychological burden on santri, who often feel burdened by the striking differences between the syntactic structure of the local language and the complexity of i'rab in Arabic.

Based on the reconstructed curriculum component data, the transition from a cognitive-theoretical paradigm toward a functional curriculum has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation linearly. When teaching materials are shifted from merely memorizing Nahwu-Sharaf rules to materials based on communicative functions and functional texts, learners' affective filters decrease drastically (Ritonga et al., 2022). This is in line with the pragmatic needs of santri in Mandailing Natal, who require language proficiency for preaching and social interaction purposes, rather than merely passive textual understanding.

Pedagogically, the integration of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and the use of authentic materials (such as podcasts or Arabic digital media), as listed in the data table, become the main catalysts in this redesign. The use of digital technology, which has begun to develop at Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, enables a transformation from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Albantani & Madkur, 2024; Bryfonski & McKay, 2024). Through the completion of

complex communicative tasks, santri are no longer trapped in stagnation in language production, but are able to use Arabic adaptively.

Therefore, implementing a curriculum redesign based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard is an urgent step (Europe, 2020). This step ensures that in institutions such as Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, Arabic is no longer regarded as a static and inaccessible "language of the heavens," but instead transforms into a living, applicable, and solution-oriented language of communication amid the global challenges of the 21st century (Mufid & Kholis, 2023; Pulungan, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The redesign of the Arabic language curriculum based on applied linguistics is a strategic step to transform the learning paradigm from a mechanistic grammatical pattern toward functional communicative competence. The results of this study show that curriculum strengthening must be based on the integration of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions, so that Arabic is no longer studied as a collection of theoretical rules, but as a living instrument of interaction. The proposed pedagogical implementation includes repositioning learning objectives based on global proficiency standards, using authentic materials adaptive to digital developments, and applying task-based methods that position learners as active participants.

More specifically, the case study at Pesantren Darul Ikhlas, Mandailing Natal demonstrates that this redesign has a real implication for reducing learners' affective barriers through an approach that respects students' local linguistic foundations. By aligning understanding of classical texts with practical communication needs, this curriculum can significantly improve the efficiency of second-language acquisition. The use of digital technology-based learning media is key to the transformation of pesantren institutions so that they remain relevant in facing the challenges of modernity.

As a recommendation, future research should be directed toward developing more specific instructional designs for digital platforms and empirically testing this curriculum model at various levels of pesantren education to measure its effectiveness on a broader and more standardized scale.

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