

## **The Challenge of Mastering Arabic Language and Its Relation to the Ability to Read Kitab Kuning among Students in Tapal Kuda Islamic Boarding School**

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**Abstract-** Arabic language (AL) proficiency is a crucial element in understanding classical Islamic texts, or Kitab Kuning (KK), and plays a central role in the curriculum of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). However, students often face difficulties mastering Arabic due to its complex grammar and vocabulary. This study aims to identify the challenges faced in mastering Arabic and the relationship between Arabic proficiency and the ability to read KK among students, particularly in Pesantren in Tapal Kuda region. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected from members of pesantren families in Tapal Kuda region, including Kyai, Nyai, Ning, Lora, pesantren administrators, as well as teachers (Ustadz and Ustadzah) and students. Data collection was carried out through observation and conversation methods with recording and note-taking techniques, as well as reflective introspective methods. Interviews were conducted to explore factors influencing Arabic proficiency and its impact on the ability to read KK. The collected data were analyzed through reduction, classification, verification, tabulation, and interpretation. The study's findings indicate that: 1) Arabic serves as an academic identity of pesantren; 2) Arabic is a central medium in KK; 3) Issues related to Arabic proficiency in the context of KK. Besides, the research findings include several factors and recommendations, namely; 1) factors impeding Arabic mastery include limited access to adequate educational resources, ineffective teaching methods, and variations in students' educational backgrounds; and 2) the findings suggest that the ability to read KK is significantly affected by the level of Arabic proficiency, particularly in aspects of grammar and vocabulary understanding. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective Arabic teaching strategies in pesantren and improve students' abilities to read and comprehend KK.

**Keywords:** Ability to Read *Kitab Kuning*, Complexity of Arabic Grammar, Pesantren Education, Teaching Strategies

### **I INTRODUCTION**

Arabic language (AL) plays a crucial role in Islamic scholarly traditions, particularly within the context of pesantren education ((Munip, 2020); (Rosyadi & Ilmi, 2021); (Azizah et al., 2024); & (Hakim et al., 2024). Pesantren in Indonesia, which consist of core elements such as

kyai, santri, Kitab Kuning, pondok, and masjid (Dhofier, 2011), function as primary educational institutions integrating religious knowledge and Arabic as the foundation for understanding classical Islamic literature (Munip, 2020); (Rosyadi & Ilmi, 2021); (Azizah et al., 2024); & (Hakim et al., 2024). A key aspect of the

pesantren curriculum is the ability to read *Kitab Kuning* (KK)—classical texts that serve as primary references in Islamic studies. KK is not only a fundamental element in the structure of pesantren knowledge but also distinguishes pesantren from other educational systems, both generally and specifically within Islamic education. The unique characteristic of KK is its use of the Arabic language as the medium of instruction, which simultaneously presents both an advantage and a challenge in understanding the texts (Syakur, 2018); (Gunawan et al., 2018); (Munaf'iah, 2021); & (Rosyadi & Ilmi, 2021).

This study aims to address the gap in research regarding the specific challenges in mastering Arabic and its relationship with the ability to read KK at Pesantren Tapal Kuda, and to provide new insights for developing more effective learning strategies. KK is written in classical Arabic, which is rich in grammatical and lexical nuances, requiring a deep mastery of the Arabic language from the students. However, proficiency in Arabic often poses a significant challenge for many students, particularly in Tapal Kuda region (Munip, 2020); (Amirudin et al., 2020); (Hamdan, 2020); (Sari 2021); & (Mustapa et al., 2021). Tapal Kuda region, while known for its strong pesantren traditions, still faces various obstacles in Arabic language learning. These challenges are not only due to the complexity of the language itself but also due to limitations in educational resources, teaching quality, and the diverse educational backgrounds of students (Munip, 2020); (Mustapa et al., 2021); & (Farid et al., 2022). This issue forms the basis of an intellectual crisis within the scholarly culture of pesantren, where the educational output of pesantren often fails to meet the mission of Islamic da'wah optimally due to inadequacies in understanding Arabic, which is the foundation of their scholarly knowledge (Barizi, 2011).

To date, no research has specifically examined the challenges in mastering AL and its relationship with the ability to read KK among students, particularly in Pesantren Tapal Kuda. However, there are several studies with related topics. Zainimal et al. (2022) found that KK covers a range of subjects, including aqidah, Arabic grammar, tafsir, hadith, ushul fiqh, fiqh, and literature, highlighting the diversity of content in KK as a challenge in mastering Arabic. Syahri (2022) investigated the scholarly traditions of pesantren, particularly the teaching system known as pengajian or pengkajian KK, revealing unique teaching methods employed in

pesantren. Abdullah (2016) emphasized KK serves as a reference for universal values in addressing various life challenges, underlining its importance in the daily lives of students. Meanwhile, Ibda et al. (2023) found that issues in AL learning involve linguistic factors, such as syntax, phonology, and writing, as well as non-linguistic factors, such as education, methods, and resources. Faisol et al. (2018) identified problems in Arabic as being morphological, syntactic, and semantic, with both internal and external causes and associated impacts. Lastly, (Hidayati & Wijaya, 2023) discovered that difficulties in learning Arabic at LIPS include hesitancy in speaking, writing difficulties (insya'), and grammatical rules (nahwu-sarf), with efforts to overcome these difficulties including familiarization with speaking and writing in Arabic.

In addition, there are several studies relevant to this research. The studies by (Muta'allim et al., 2020); (Fahmi Reza Alfani, 2021); (Muta'allim et al., 2021); (Hairus Salikin et al., 2021); (Mta'allim et al., 2022); (Muta'alim, 2022); (Sofyan, Firmansyah, et al., 2022); (Akhmad Sofyan et al., 2022); (Sofyan, Badrudin, et al., 2022); (Irsyadi et al., 2022); (Yudistira et al., 2022); (Yudistira, R., 2023); (Haryono et al., 2023); & (Daulay et al., 2024) highlight various aspects related to language, including language variation, types of languages, speech levels, language use contexts, meanings and functions of language, intercultural communication, language

symbols and signs, language mixing, and language in the context of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). These studies contribute significantly to the understanding of language use, function, and meaning in different contexts.

The research conducted by (Karuru et al., 2023); (Merizawati & Munawir, n.d.); (Suryanti et al., 2023); & (Irsyadi, 2023) highlights the roles, functions, strategies, and implementations related to language acquisition and improvement.

Meanwhile, studies by (Sutanto et al., 2022); (Ghasi Pathollah et al., 2022); (Muta'allim et al., 2022); (Julhadi et al., 2023); (Dumiyati et al., 2023); (Kamil et al., 2023); (Muta'allim et al., 2023); (Mahardhani et al., 2023); & (Kamil et al., 2023) focus on managerial aspects, enhancement, social norms and pesantren, conflict management, curriculum development, and tolerance in achieving interfaith harmony and other related aspects. These studies contribute to efforts in fostering interfaith harmony through religious moderation. However, based on the

existing literature review, there has been no research specifically addressing the challenges of mastering Arabic and its relationship with the ability to read KK among santri, particularly in Pesantren Tapal Kuda. Therefore, this research is considered relatively novel and intriguing. It offers significant innovation by exploring the relationship between Arabic proficiency and the ability to read the Kitab Kuning in Tapal Kuda, an area known for its diverse pesantren and unique traditional teaching approaches. Although KK is a crucial component of the pesantren curriculum, in-depth studies on the specific challenges of mastering Arabic and its impact on understanding this text are still very limited, especially in local contexts like Tapal Kuda.

This research presents several novelties and important contributions. First, it employs a comprehensive qualitative method to explore various factors influencing Arabic proficiency, including pedagogical, cultural, and social aspects that may have been overlooked in previous studies. Through this approach, the research not only provides an overview of the difficulties faced by santri in learning Arabic but also offers deep insights into how these challenges can be addressed to improve their ability to read KK. Second, this research contributes to the development of contextualized Arabic teaching strategies that better align with the needs and educational backgrounds of santri in Tapal Kuda. The goal is to explore the challenges of mastering Arabic and how these relate to the ability to read the KK among santri in pesantren in Tapal Kuda region. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study aims to identify the factors influencing Arabic learning and provide recommendations to enhance teaching effectiveness in pesantren environments.

Research on the challenges of mastering AL and its relationship to the ability to read KK at Pesantren Tapal Kuda has significant practical implications for Arabic language teaching at Islamic boarding schools. The findings from this study can identify specific needs that must be addressed, enabling the development of a more targeted curriculum with an emphasis on Arabic aspects relevant to KK. The curriculum could be designed to be modular and incremental to facilitate student comprehension. Additionally, teaching methods could be adapted to be more interactive and incorporate technology, such as language learning apps and e-learning platforms. If the research reveals shortcomings in current teaching methods, additional training for

educators becomes crucial. This includes professional development on the latest techniques and workshops on effective teaching strategies.

Provision of adequate resources is also critical. Enhancing the collection of Arabic books and references in the pesantren library, as well as providing relevant learning materials, can support the learning process. The study could also contribute to designing a more accurate assessment system through integrated evaluations and regular feedback for students. Finally, implementing tailored learning strategies, such as differentiated approaches and individual guidance, can address specific student needs. By applying these recommendations, pesantren in Tapal Kuda can enhance the effectiveness of AL instruction and the ability to read KK, thereby improving the overall quality of education at the institution.

Theories on language learning difficulties identify various individual factors that contribute to challenges in learning a second language, which are relevant for understanding the difficulties faced by santri in mastering Arabic at pesantren in Tapal Kuda. These factors can be categorized into three main aspects: psychological, cognitive, and environmental. Psychological aspects play a crucial role in second language acquisition. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is a key determinant of success in language learning (Dornyei, 2005). Santri with low motivation may find it harder to master Arabic. Additionally, language anxiety—fear or worry about using a second language—is a significant barrier (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). In Pesantren, the pressure to understand KK thoroughly may exacerbate this anxiety. Self-confidence also affects learning ability; santri with low self-confidence tend to face greater difficulties in the learning process (Bandura, 1997).

Second, cognitive aspects encompass mental abilities that support language learning. Strong working memory enables santri to store and process AL information effectively (Baddeley, 2003). Difficulties with working memory can hinder vocabulary memorization and grammatical understanding. Additionally, phonological processing abilities—related to recognizing and processing language sounds—are crucial for mastering Arabic. Challenges in this area can disrupt understanding of pronunciation and language structure (Snowling & Hulme, 1994). Metacognitive awareness, or

the ability to manage one's learning processes, is also a critical factor. Santri with low metacognitive awareness may struggle to develop effective learning strategies (Flavell, 1979). Third, the learning environment significantly impacts the success of second language acquisition. Ineffective or unsuitable teaching methods can impede the learning process.

In Pesantren, traditional teaching methods may not always be suitable for all santri, especially if they are not adapted to individual learning styles (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Furthermore, limited access to educational resources, such as textbooks and audiovisual materials, can be a significant barrier to language mastery (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Social support from teachers, peers, and family also plays an important role. Santri who lack social support may feel isolated and lose motivation, which can ultimately hinder their learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of santri at Pesantren Tapal Kuda, these theories provide a framework for identifying and understanding specific challenges in mastering Arabic. For instance, santri with language anxiety or low motivation will face greater difficulties. If the learning environment at the pesantren is unsupportive or teaching methods are not tailored to individual needs, the barriers to reading KK will be even greater. By understanding these factors, this research aims to offer recommendations to enhance AL learning in pesantren, such as developing more adaptive teaching methods, improving access to educational resources, and strengthening social support for santri.

## **II. METHODS**

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach focusing on the speech of individuals associated with pesantren in Tapal Kuda region. A descriptive qualitative approach is highly suitable for exploring the complex and multifaceted challenges students face in mastering AL and reading KK. This approach provides a deep and nuanced understanding of students' experiences, capturing contextual details and personal perceptions that may be overlooked by quantitative methods. By employing methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the descriptive qualitative approach allows researchers to gather detailed narratives and insights into the challenges, motivations, and

contextual factors affecting students. This flexibility and focus on participants' perspectives ensure that the study reflects their lived realities, offering a comprehensive picture of the difficulties encountered in learning the language and reading traditional texts. Data sources include Kyai, Nyai, Ning, Lora, pesantren administrators, teachers (Ustadz and Ustadzah), and santri. Data collection is conducted through observational participatory listening method, using recording and note-taking techniques to capture relevant speech. Additionally, the researcher employs a reflective introspective method, engaging directly in the research and drawing from personal experiences and interactions with informants.

The observational participatory listening method can be effectively implemented by carefully designing the observation process. Researchers would conduct observations within the school, focusing on classrooms where Arabic is taught, study areas for KK, and informal settings where students interact. The observation period should span several weeks or months, with each session lasting 1 to 2 hours to capture a broad range of activities and interactions. Observations should occur 2 to 3 times per week and at various times of day to understand different contexts and impacts. Initially, researchers would observe passively, taking detailed field notes, and gradually engage in informal conversations to gain deeper insights. With necessary permissions, audio or video recordings might be used to capture verbal and non-verbal interactions. Regular review and analysis of these notes and recordings would help identify patterns and themes related to students' challenges in mastering Arabic and reading KK, providing a comprehensive view of their experiences.

In the data analysis process, several steps are undertaken. First, the collected data undergoes reduction, which involves sorting and selecting data relevant to the research focus. The data is then classified by type to facilitate grouping. Data verification is performed through consultations with members of the pesantren community, language experts, community leaders, and pesantren administrators to ensure the accuracy of the information. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data and findings in this study, several important steps need to be taken. First, data collection procedures should be standardized by using consistent measurement tools and uniform conditions across all

participants, and by providing training for evaluators to ensure consistent procedures. Re-testing the same group can be conducted to assess result consistency, while inter-rater reliability should be measured using statistical methods to evaluate agreement among different raters. Preliminary testing with a small group is also crucial to refine the measurement tools before the main implementation.

Next, assessment validity must be considered, ensuring that the assessment reflects the intended constructs and that the measurement tools used are appropriate for assessing AL skills and KK reading ability. Involving experts in reviewing the measurement tools can help ensure that the assessment covers all relevant aspects. Criterion validity should be examined by comparing results with established benchmarks, while external validity is important to ensure that findings can be generalized to other populations. Face validity should also be considered to ensure that the assessment appears relevant and appropriate from the perspective of both participants and educators. Additionally, data accuracy and integrity should be maintained through careful documentation and routine data cleaning. Proper statistical analysis is needed to evaluate the relationships between Arabic language skills and KK reading ability, including checking the fulfillment of necessary assumptions. Finally, the study should be replicated or encouraged to be replicated in different contexts to strengthen the reliability of the findings. By implementing these steps, it is hoped that the study will produce valid and reliable data, providing accurate insights into the challenges of mastering the AL and reading KK. The data is then tabulated, with codes assigned to the entries in a table. Finally, the researcher interprets the data to gain a deep understanding and draw conclusions based on the interpretative results. With this methodology, the research aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the challenges of mastering Arabic and its impact on reading KK among santri at Pesantren Tapal Kuda.

### **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **RESULT**

The study's findings indicate that: 1) Arabic serves as an academic identity of pesantren; 2) Arabic is a central medium in KK; 3) Issues related to Arabic proficiency in the context of KK. Besides, the research findings include several factors and recommendations, namely; 1) factors impeding Arabic mastery include limited access to adequate educational resources, ineffective teaching methods, and variations in students' educational backgrounds; and 2) the findings suggest that the ability to read KK is significantly affected by the level of Arabic proficiency, particularly in aspects of grammar and vocabulary understanding. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective Arabic teaching strategies in pesantren and improve students' abilities to read and comprehend KK. The research finding highlight that AL functions as a defining feature of the pesantren's scholarly identity, underscoring its significant role in shaping the academic and cultural characteristics of the pesantren. Second, Arabic serves as the central medium for reading KK, highlighting its crucial importance in understanding the religious texts that are taught. Third, the study identifies issues in mastering Arabic that impact the ability to read the KK. Factors hindering the mastery of Arabic include limited access to adequate educational resources, ineffective teaching methods, and the diverse educational backgrounds of the santri. Additionally, the research shows that the ability to read KK is closely tied to Arabic proficiency, particularly in grammar and vocabulary comprehension. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective Arabic teaching strategies within pesantren and to enhance the santri's skills in reading and understanding KK. To provide a clearer picture, a table illustrating the role of Arabic in Pesantren Tapal Kuda is presented below.

**Table 1.1: The Role of Arabic in Pesantren Tapal Kuda**

<b>Data Code</b>	<b>The Role of Arabic at Pesantren Tapal Kuda</b>	<b>Description</b>
ALAIIBC	Arabic Language as the Academic Identity of Islamic Boarding Schools	In the Bayani tradition, Arabic plays a central role as the primary medium in the Qur'an and Hadith. Arabic is not only a symbol of Islamic identity but also serves as the main language in Islamic education, particularly in pesantren. Within the pesantren, Arabic

		becomes an integral element connecting various aspects of religious education. The structural and cultural linkage between pesantren, KK, and Arabic creates a harmonious Islamic educational system, where Arabic functions as the foundation for studying and teaching religious texts. Thus, Arabic is not merely a language of instruction but also a custodian of tradition and religious identity in pesantren education.
ALCMCIT	Arabic Language as a Central Medium in Classical Islamic Texts	In the context of KK, Arabic is a central element because these texts are directly derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. KK utilizes Arabic to preserve the authenticity of the meanings conveyed in the Qur'an and Hadith, ensuring that the interpretations and teachings remain consistent with the original sources. Interpretations in Arabic are considered more accurate and closer to the original intent than translations into other languages, which may encounter more complex interpretative challenges. Thus, Arabic serves not only as the medium of the text but also as a key to maintaining the integrity and authenticity of Islamic teachings in KK.
CALPMCIT	Challenges of Arabic Language Proficiency in Mastering Classical Islamic Texts	In pesantren education, <i>Nahwu</i> and <i>Sharraf</i> are fundamental subjects as they serve as essential tools for understanding KK and other Islamic sciences. However, several issues hinder the learning of these subjects. These challenges include the perception that <i>Nahwu</i> and <i>Sharraf</i> are difficult to study, the diminishing significance of KK in the curriculum, and a greater emphasis on <i>barakah</i> (blessings) rather than understanding the knowledge itself. Additionally, the dominance of Qur'an studies and the pesantren's focus on formal education over traditional scholarly activities also contribute to these obstacles. These factors collectively impact the mastery of <i>Nahwu</i> and <i>Sharraf</i> , which in turn affects the comprehension and proficiency in KK and Islamic knowledge as a whole.

The table highlights the central role of Arabic in Pesantren Tapal Kuda across various aspects. First, Arabic serves as the academic identity of Islamic boarding schools, symbolizing Islamic identity and functioning as the main language of instruction. In the Bayani tradition, Arabic is integral to religious education, linking various elements of the curriculum and maintaining the pesantren's scholarly traditions. Second, Arabic is crucial for KK, as these texts are derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Arabic ensures the preservation of the authenticity and

accuracy of religious meanings, which translations may not fully capture. Lastly, challenges in Arabic proficiency impact the mastery of classical Islamic texts. Issues such as the perception of *Nahwu* and *Sharraf* as difficult, the decreased emphasis on KK, and the focus on *barakah* rather than deep understanding, coupled with the dominance of Qur'an studies and formal education, hinder the effective learning and application of these essential subjects. These challenges affect the overall comprehension and proficiency in KK and Islamic knowledge.

**Table 1.2: The Significant Position of Arabic Language at Pesantren Tapal Kuda**

Data Code	Aspect	Precentage	Description
AF	Academic Function	95%	AL serves as the primary language for teaching religious knowledge and KK at the pesantren.
CC	Connection with Curriculum	90%	AL is an integral component of the pesantren curriculum, used in teaching and studying religious texts.
RPI	Role in Pesantren Identity	85%	AL shapes the scholarly identity of the pesantren, marking the uniqueness and authenticity of its teaching methods.
UC	Use in Communication	80%	AL is used in formal and ritual communication, as well as in everyday language within the context of religious education.

TM	Teaching Methods	75%	Arabic teaching at the pesantren involves traditional methods and direct instruction, with an emphasis on memorization and text comprehension.
CM	Challenges in Mastery	70%	Challenges include limited access to resources, ineffective teaching methods, and the diverse educational backgrounds of the santri.
IRKK	Impact on Reading KK	85%	Proficiency in AL significantly affects santri's ability to read and understand KK, especially in terms of grammar and vocabulary.

This table provides an overview of how AL functions and impacts various aspects at Pesantren Tapal Kuda, as well as the challenges faced in mastering and implementing it. Besides, this table highlights the percentages for each aspect, illustrating the significant role of the Arabic language at Pesantren Tapal Kuda and emphasizing its importance in various dimensions of education at the pesantren.

## DISCUSSION

Arabic, like other languages, shares similar characteristics, consisting of words as signs and meanings (Jundi et al., 2021). Linguistically, all languages follow similar structural patterns, including elements such as words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourse. Consequently, languages exhibit intratextual relations that follow comparable patterns. Mastery of one language influences how an individual approaches other languages; thus, proficiency in one language—whether in listening, speaking, reading, or writing—can facilitate the learning of additional languages, including Arabic. Humans, as systematic language users, are identified by Ernest Cassirer as *Animal Symbolicum* (Wijanarko, 2024)—symbol creators. This symbolic creation enables humans to build complex systems of life, such as religion, society, and education. Language becomes the means by which humans connect with realities beyond themselves. Martin Heidegger expresses this by saying that humans “dwell in language” (Timur et al.), while Jacques Derrida asserts that “there is nothing outside the text” (Simamora, 2005). These philosophical reflections underscore the crucial role of language in human existential construction and in shaping complex systems of life.

Language plays a crucial role in preserving human memory. Without language, humans would only perceive things through direct sensory experience and would be unable to store information like animals (Humaeni). Through linguistic symbols, humans can create systems to

differentiate between various things and retain memories even when objects are no longer present. In other words, language enables rational operation and exploration of possibilities that have not yet occurred. Thus, one of the factors that elevate humans is the possession and use of language. Moreover, every language carries inherent ideological aspects that are inseparable (Antonius, 2019). Language is a cultural product of the community that uses it. In this context, Arabic encompasses implicit aspects of Islam. Although Arabic existed long before the advent of Islam, all Islamic aspects, such as teachings and practices, evolved within the Arab culture and established a religious system based on Arabic. Consequently, the relationship between Arabic and Islam is primordial, legitimative, and authoritative, given that Arabic is a profound Islamic identity, particularly concerning the primary sources of Islam: the Qur'an as divine speech and the Hadith as the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad SAW.

## Arabic Language as the Academic Identity of Islamic Boarding Schools (ALAIIBC)

In the Bayani tradition, which is grounded in textual sources (nash) as a guide for thought and action, language holds a central and pivotal role. This tradition prioritizes texts or language as the foundation for all aspects of tradition. As part of the epistemological domain of Islam, the Bayani tradition has influenced the development of Islamic knowledge from the early centuries to the present. Some argue that the stagnation in the progress of Islamic scholarship is due to the overwhelming dominance of the Bayani tradition. However, it cannot be denied that early Islamic tradition was fundamentally Bayani, centered around the AL.

Arabic is central to the structure of Islamic tradition because the Qur'an and Hadith—the two primary sources of Islamic teachings—are expressed in Arabic. The Qur'an and Hadith encompass all aspects of Islamic teachings, from fundamental beliefs (aqidah) and jurisprudence

(fiqh) to ethics (akhlak). Therefore, all aspects of Islamic tradition that refer to the Qur'an and Hadith must be mediated through Arabic. This is reinforced by as-Syafi'i's explanation, which

describes the hierarchical authorization of Islamic teachings: first through divine discourse (bayan ilahi) in the Qur'an, then prophetic discourse (bayan nabawi) in the Hadith, and finally rational discourse (bayan aqli) through scholarly ijtihad based on the Qur'an and Hadith. This hierarchical authorization is considered legitimate in Islamic epistemology for belief, thought, and action. Thus, Arabic serves not only as a tool of communication but also as a symbol of Islamic identity, both implicitly and explicitly.

The linguistic identity of Arabic does not automatically mandate its universal understanding and study by all Muslims worldwide. However, understanding original Islam does require engagement with the Arabic language. As the language of Sharia and primary scholarly discourse, Arabic plays a crucial role in the transmission of Islamic values. This importance is tied to the Qur'an and Hadith, which encompass not only Islamic doctrine but also scientific aspects, given that Islam pertains not only to transcendental dimensions but also to social and horizontal improvements in society. Islam, as a religion that emphasizes the value of knowledge, is articulated by scholars within the

framework of Islamic sources, which are generally in Arabic. This has led to Arabic being one of the most widely spoken languages globally, as Islam is the final divine religion with adherents who dominate the global population.

In international interactions, Arabic is explicitly understood as the language of the Muslim community at large. The Islamic scholarly tradition, using Arabic, has spread worldwide alongside the expansion of Islam, including in Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren in the Nusantara region. Thus, Arabic continues to play a vital role in disseminating and preserving Islamic scholarly traditions across various parts of the world. Pesantren, as a traditional Islamic educational institution born from the dialectical interaction between local Nusantara traditions and Islam, is renowned for its steadfast adherence to scholarly traditions taught through the Arabic-language curriculum of KK. This traditionalism is not due to an inability to adapt to modern developments in physical aspects like buildings or facilities, but rather due to its commitment to a learning tradition that has been preserved for centuries.

AL (KK) curriculum is central to this traditionalism, illustrating that this tradition has been consistently maintained since the establishment of pesantren.

More deeply, pesantren can be considered the rightful heir of AL within the Muslim community. This is because there are specific areas within pesantren that are conducive to internalizing the AL, both in terms of nurturing potential and practical skills. In this context, the potential of Arabic includes aspects such as nahwu, sharraf, balaghah, and mantiq, which are part of the Arabic language sciences, as described by Musthafa al-Ghalayayni. However, Arabic in this realm of potential has yet to be translated into practical skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, as long as Arabic remains within the theoretical domain without practical application, it remains in the realm of potential. Thus, Arabic becomes the scholarly identity of pesantren because it is inseparable from the Qur'an, Hadith, and all their derivatives, which are commonly found in the form of classical or KK texts. These KK texts, in turn, are a defining feature of the pesantren educational system, as no other educational system outside of pesantren makes KK and Arabic the core of its curriculum. Consequently, pesantren, KK, and Arabic are deeply interconnected both structurally and culturally, coming together to form a distinctive Islamic educational system.

### **Arabic Language as a Central Medium in Classical Islamic Texts (ALCMCIT)**

In the context of KK Arabic is a central and integral element because these texts are derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, which are both in Arabic. As derivatives, KK must use Arabic to ensure the authenticity of the meanings conveyed in the Qur'an and Hadith. Using Arabic ensures that interpretations and explanations remain close to the original intent, thus minimizing the risk of misinterpretation. In contrast, interpretations in other languages, which involve different symbols and cultural contexts, face more complex challenges and barriers. Therefore, proficiency in Arabic is a fundamental requirement for those interpreting or explaining Islamic teachings. Lack of proficiency in Arabic may lead to explanations of Islamic teachings being considered unreliable or untrustworthy.

KK has been compiled by Islamic scholars from the early Islamic period through the medieval era and continues to be developed today. These early scholars compiled these texts,

known as *kutub turatsiyah*, to elucidate the Qur'an and Hadith so that Islam could address contemporary issues and human life, from matters of faith to daily living. The compilation of these texts followed a scholarly lineage connected to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). In Islam, this connection is known as *sanad*, and its disruption can lead to what is termed as 'innovation' or *bid'ah*, which is generally not permitted except in cases unrelated to the core teachings of Islam.

The existence of KK which represents an extended explanation by scholars while remaining grounded in authoritative Islamic sources, uses Arabic as its medium. The teachings of Islam, which originally emerged in Arabia, are best understood within the context of Arab culture, including its language. Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and beyond, as Islam spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula, the Arabic language and Arab culture have retained a profound and inseparable connection with Islamic teachings. Thus, despite the use of different languages across various regions, the spread of Islam worldwide has consistently carried Arabic as an integral part of its scholarly heritage and the transmission of Islamic values. Consequently, learning Arabic in pesantren is a fundamental subject that must be mastered as a prerequisite for deeply understanding and studying Islamic teachings. It is not surprising that many knowledgeable pesantren kiai have strong proficiency in Arabic, particularly in the aspect of reading KK.

The tradition of compiling KK among pesantren scholars generally employs Arabic rather than local languages. This is because Arabic serves as the universal language in the Islamic world, particularly in the contexts of worship and scholarship, even though it may not always be used in everyday conversation. Historically, before the influence of the Wahhabi movement in Arabia, the learning process in places like Haramain was a significant tradition. In Haramain, there were communities of Javanese students who came to seek knowledge, and many scholars from the Nusantara region, such as Syekh Khotib al-Minangkabawi, Syekh Khotib Sambas, Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani, and Syekh Yasin al-Fadani, were known as teachers there.

Additionally, prominent pesantren kiai like KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, KH. As'ad Syamsul Arifin, and KH. Zaini Mun'im also studied in Mecca and wrote books in Arabic, despite their native

languages being Javanese, Madurese, or other local languages. This tradition highlights that building Islamic scholarship based on Arabic language and Arab culture has been a long-standing and historically recognized practice. It not only preserves the authority of Islamic teachings but also maintains a cultural connection to the sources of Islamic doctrine. Various texts also support this tradition, emphasizing the importance of Arabic in maintaining the authenticity and validity of Islamic teachings.

### **Challenges of Arabic Language Proficiency in Mastering Classical Islamic Texts (CALPMCIT)**

In pesantren education, Nahwu and Sharraf are foundational subjects introduced early to students, alongside al-Qur'an and Tauhid. This is due to their crucial role as part of the Arabic language sciences, serving as essential tools for understanding other more substantial subjects. The term "tools" in this context refers to knowledge that acts as a bridge to comprehend other, more substantive sciences. In other words, Nahwu and Sharraf are fundamental for facilitating the understanding of KK which in turn aids in comprehending broader Islamic teachings, such as Tauhid, Akhlak, Fiqh, and Tariikh, among others. However, significant challenges often arise in learning these foundational sciences.

One major issue is the pervasive mindset that both Sharraf and Nahwu are difficult disciplines. This belief has spread among pesantren communities, passed down from generation to generation, from classical to modern periods, and from traditional to contemporary pesantren. Expressions such as Sharraf and Nahwu are complex with many branches, unlike other sciences, tools of knowledge cannot be understood instantly; they require extensive time and strong memorization, and only exceptional and intelligent students can grasp these sciences reflect this mindset. This entrenched belief negatively impacts students' motivation and ability to study Nahwu and Sharraf effectively. Consequently, only a few students are able to truly understand and proficiently read KK.

Secondly, the declining significance of KK has become a significant issue in pesantren education. In an era of rapid technological and informational advancements, coupled with the dominance of capitalism, materialism often

overtakes societal mindsets. This shift has led to a diminishing appreciation of religious materials, including KK, which are increasingly viewed as lacking practical relevance in daily life. The influence of agnosticism and atheism from Western cultures, as well as the rising strength of secularism, has affected Eastern cultures, including perspectives on religion and Islam. Amidst these conflicting values, the role of KK as a cornerstone of Islamic scholarship is being perceived as less relevant. KK is often seen as focusing solely on spiritual and transcendental aspects, which are perceived as disconnected from practical human life. As a result, there has been a decline in the interest among santri to study KK. They may feel that learning from KK does not align with the needs and challenges of modern life. In other words, the perceived irrelevance of the knowledge contained in KK to contemporary issues has led to a decreased emphasis on its study.

Thirdly, the orientation towards barakah (blessings) rather than knowledge presents another challenge in pesantren education. In some cases, there has been a shift from the original aim of pesantren as a place for intellectual development to a primary focus on spirituality. Many santri enter pesantren with the main goal of seeking barakah from the kiai, often sidelining the importance of scholarly knowledge. The belief that barakah from the kiai or pesantren is more important than acquiring knowledge has become prevalent, with the notion that without barakah, the knowledge gained will be useless or even detrimental. This understanding frequently overlooks the fact that the learning process itself—which should be taken seriously—is the foundation for attaining barakah. This lack of seriousness in the learning process contributes to weak proficiency in Arabic and KK among santri.

Fourthly, the dominance of Quran memorization or tahfidz also affects the pesantren education system. Pesantren play a crucial role in preserving and disseminating Islamic teachings, with a strong focus on the Quran and Hadith. However, excessive emphasis on improving Quran recitation and memorization often neglects other important aspects of understanding Islam, such as tafaqquh fid din (depth of understanding in Islam). The tahfidz programs, which are popular in many pesantren, receive widespread support from the community, but they often overlook other Islamic subjects, including aqidah, fiqh, and more. These

programs sometimes focus solely on the recitation of the Quran without addressing its deeper meanings or context. The neglect of tafaqquh fid din and other crucial materials indirectly results in the neglect of KK and Arabic studies, which are essential for a comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings.

Fifthly, the phenomenon of students attending pesantren not to study religious knowledge but primarily to pursue formal education poses a significant challenge to modern pesantren education. With the rise of materialism impacting Islamic education in the millennium era, many pesantren have transformed from traditional (salaf) models to modern ones by adopting classical or formal educational systems. Pesantren that follow the kholaf model integrate Islamic education with general education to meet societal demands and geo-economic needs. In this context, the orientation of students towards religious study often gets overlooked, as many come to pesantren with the primary goal of formal schooling and obtaining diplomas. This phenomenon reflects the impact of capitalism infiltrating all aspects of life, including pesantren education systems.

Therefore, the issues surrounding proficiency in Arabic and the inability of santri to understand KK are complex and multifaceted. These problems cannot be addressed with a single solution but require a comprehensive and sustained approach. Efforts to address the intellectual crisis in pesantren need to involve the integration of structural, cultural, and financial aspects of pesantren. These three aspects must be combined in strategies to mitigate the crisis and enhance the understanding of santri regarding the rich heritage of KK. This research makes a significant contribution to understanding the mastery of Arabic in Indonesia, specifically in Pesantren Tapal Kuda. By analyzing the factors affecting students' ability to read KK this study enriches the understanding of the challenges faced in mastering Arabic, which has previously been limited in local studies. Additionally, this research has the potential to expand the application of language learning difficulty theories by identifying how psychological, cognitive, and environmental factors specifically influence AL mastery.

The findings from this research can contribute to the development of language learning theories, particularly within the context of traditional Islamic education in Indonesia. The

results may also serve as a basis for formulating educational policies in pesantren, particularly in developing more effective AL curricula and teaching methods. By understanding the challenges faced by students, pesantren administrators and educational policymakers can design more appropriate interventions to enhance Arabic language proficiency among students. Furthermore, this study highlights the need for adaptive teaching methods for Arabic in Pesantren Tapal Kuda. Administrators can consider implementing more adaptable teaching methods that take into account individual differences in motivation, cognitive abilities, and environmental support. Increasing access to learning resources, such as textbooks, audio-visual materials, and other teaching aids, is also crucial for addressing the barriers identified in this research.

The research also emphasizes the importance of psychological and social support in learning Arabic. Pesantren could develop programs that support students' emotional well-being and self-confidence, such as counseling and mentoring programs. Such support is expected to reduce language anxiety and increase learning motivation, which will ultimately positively impact students' ability to read KK. Therefore, the results of this study can be used to review and update the Arabic language curriculum in pesantren, making it more flexible and responsive to students' learning needs. By integrating a more holistic approach to language teaching that balances psychological, cognitive, and environmental aspects, this research has the potential to make a significant contribution to educational practices in pesantren as well as to the development of more effective and inclusive educational policies.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

This research highlights the close relationship between Arabic proficiency and the ability of students at Pesantren Tapal Kuda to read KK. The challenges in mastering Arabic are influenced by various factors, including psychological aspects such as motivation and language anxiety, cognitive aspects like working memory and phonological processing abilities, and environmental aspects such as teaching methods and access to educational resources. The findings of this study indicate that more adaptive teaching methods, improved access to resources, and strong psychological and social support are crucial for addressing these challenges. To

enhance students' ability to read KK, a holistic approach that considers psychological, cognitive, and environmental factors in balance is required. The results of this study provide a solid foundation for developing more effective and inclusive educational policies in pesantren and encourage the implementation of learning strategies that are more responsive to the individual needs of students.

Future research could focus on several key areas to deepen the understanding of the challenges associated with Arabic proficiency among students. Firstly, a more detailed exploration of psychological aspects such as language anxiety and motivation can help clarify how these factors specifically impact students' ability to read KK. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or observations, could offer richer insights into the personal experiences of students. Secondly, investigating and testing the effectiveness of various innovative Arabic teaching methods—such as technology-based learning or communicative approaches—through experiments with control groups at pesantren could help identify the most effective teaching strategies. Additionally, comparative studies between pesantren in different regions or with differing teaching approaches could broaden the understanding of Arabic learning challenges in a wider context.

Further research could also examine the role of social support from family, peers, and the pesantren community in the Arabic learning process. Longitudinal studies that track changes in social support over time could provide significant insights. Evaluating the impact of pesantren educational policies on Arabic proficiency is another important area for research. This could assist in designing more effective policy interventions. Additionally, in the context of Indonesia's multilingual environment, future studies could explore how proficiency in Indonesian and local languages affects the process of learning Arabic in pesantren. Through these recommendations, future research is expected to enrich understanding and make significant contributions to the development of Arabic education in pesantren.

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