

## From Grammar-Centered to Communicative Materials: Rethinking Arabic Language Teaching Resources in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This study examines how Arabic teaching materials mediate the relationship between grammatical knowledge and communicative competence in higher education. It addresses three questions: (1) to what extent materials remain grammar-centered, (2) how communicative and hybrid orientations are represented, and (3) how grammar can support effective communication. The study is urgent due to the persistent mismatch between communicative policy frameworks (e.g., CEFR) and the continued dominance of form-focused materials, which constrains learners' communicative ability. Using a systematic state-of-the-art review of Scopus-indexed studies (2020–2026), this research applies thematic-critical synthesis. Data validity is ensured through transparent selection criteria, triangulation of empirical and conceptual sources, and iterative coding. Findings show that grammar-centered materials still dominate, while communicative innovations remain largely additive. Crucially, effective Arabic communication requires not the elimination of grammar, but its integration as a functional resource within meaning-focused and task-based learning. Misalignment occurs when grammar

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is treated as an end rather than a means. This study contributes by reconceptualizing the grammar–communication relationship and by proposing a context-sensitive framework for the development of communicative Arabic materials in higher education.

**Keywords:** Arabic language teaching materials; communicative competence; Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL); Islamic higher education; CEFR-oriented curriculum.

## Introduction

For decades, Arabic language teaching in higher education has been dominated by a grammar-centered paradigm that prioritizes mastery of morphology (*ṣarf*), syntax (*naḥw*), and metalinguistic explanation over functional language use. This orientation is historically rooted in classical Arabic scholarship and reinforced by philological and religious traditions, particularly within Islamic higher education institutions.<sup>1</sup> Empirical studies, however, consistently demonstrate that excessive reliance on grammar-focused materials correlates with limited communicative proficiency, particularly in Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) context.<sup>2</sup> Learners often exhibit weak oral skills, reduced pragmatic competence, and increased anxiety in communicative tasks.<sup>3</sup>

While these findings validate the long-standing critique of form-focused instruction, it is important to note that grammar-centered approaches are not inherently ineffective critically. From a linguistic perspective, grammatical competence remains a necessary foundation for accurate language production, especially in Arabic, where morphological and syntactic systems are highly complex.<sup>4</sup> The problem, therefore, is not the presence of grammar, but its pedagogical positioning as an end rather than a resource for communication. This tension reflects a broader theoretical divide between structuralist traditions and

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<sup>1</sup> A Haris, “Teaching Reading of Arabic Language in Indonesia: Reconstruction of the Contents and Scope of Nahwu Science,” *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8, no. 2 (2022): 122–36, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911547>; A Facchin, *Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language: Origins, Developments and Current Directions*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463720601>.

<sup>2</sup> M Al-Batal, “Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in the Twenty-First Century: Accommodating Change,” 2024, 227–39; D Abo El Seoud, *Challenges in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language*, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> H Brosh, “Exploring Undergraduate Students’ Preferences for Oral Corrective Feedback in Arabic as a Foreign Language,” *Al-‘Arabiyya* 57 (2024): 1–31; J Faraj and A Zawawi, “Unraveling Arabic Learning Challenges: A Case Study at SOAS,” *An-Najab University Journal for Research - B (Humanities)* 38, no. 12 (2024): 2425–40, <https://doi.org/10.35552/0247.38.12.2297>; Noza Aflisia and Hazuar Hazuar, “Pengembangan Bahan Ajar Bahasa Arab Berbasis Pendekatan Komunikatif,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 4, no. 1 (May 8, 2020): 111, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v4i1.1380>.

<sup>4</sup> Noza Aflisia et al., “Komparasi Pembelajaran Nahwu Di Pesantren Dan Madrasah,” *Al-Fathin: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab* 5, no. 1 (June 29, 2022): 97–110, <https://doi.org/10.32332/AL-FATHIN.V5I01.4231>.

communicative competence frameworks, which emphasize language as social action rather than a static system.

Recent scholarship has increasingly advocated a shift toward communicative, learner-centered, and integrated-skills approaches in Arabic language education. Research on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based instruction, and CEFR-aligned curricula demonstrates positive effects on learner engagement, interactional competence, and functional language use.<sup>5</sup> Parallel developments include the adoption of digital platforms, mobile learning applications, and AI-supported materials to enhance authenticity and learner autonomy.<sup>6</sup> However, critical reviews reveal that such innovations often remain superficial, as teaching materials continue to reproduce grammar-first epistemologies despite adopting communicative terminology. This indicates a persistent misalignment between policy-level reforms and actual material design practices.<sup>7</sup>

The urgency of this study lies in this unresolved contradiction. Despite extensive advocacy for communicative approaches, Arabic teaching materials in higher education -particularly within Islamic contexts- have not undergone substantial pedagogical transformation. This stagnation risks producing graduates who possess declarative grammatical knowledge but cannot communicate effectively in academic, religious, and professional contexts. Furthermore, the rapid integration of digital and AI-based tools has not fundamentally altered this paradigm, often reinforcing rather than transforming grammar-centered practices.

Although prior studies have examined teaching methods, learner outcomes, and technological innovations, there remains a critical gap in understanding teaching materials as the central mediating artifact between curriculum policy, pedagogy, and learner experience. Existing literature rarely

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<sup>5</sup> A S Alharbi, "Communicative Language Teaching Approach in a Saudi Context: A Critical Appraisal," *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 10, no. 1 (2024): 60–71, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.10106>; M M Güngenci and M Yildiz, "Challenges in Listening and Speaking Skills for Arabic Language Pre-Service Teachers: A Correlational Study," *Novitas-ROYAL* 18, no. 2 (2024): 104–16, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13860910>.

<sup>6</sup> M A Adel et al., "The Contribution of Smartphone Apps to Develop Teaching the Arabic Language 'Arabic Is My Language's App' as a Sample," *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 6, no. 6 (2024): 1175–90, <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i6.7408>; M Ritonga et al., "The Effect of Technology on Arabic Language Learning in Higher Education," *Journal of Education and Learning* 18, no. 1 (2024): 116–27, <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v18i1.20867>; A Allaithy and M Zaki, "Evaluation of AI-Generated Reading Comprehension Materials for Arabic Language Teaching," *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2025.2474037>.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Haddad Richard and Anisatu Thoyyibah, "Qurtub. My. Id: Website Innovation as a Nahw Learning Media at Ar-Rohmah Integral High School of Malang," *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 1 (2024): 147, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i1.9635>; E Farhah et al., "Redefining Arabic in the Global Era: A Critical Examination of Silsilat Al-Lisan Textbooks," *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language* 12, no. 2 (2024): 121–37, <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijsc.2024.2023429.3397>; P Siwiec, "Grammatical Redundancy and Metalanguage in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language," 2024, 81–92.

provides a systematic, theory-driven synthesis of how materials embody (or fail to embody) the transition from grammar-centered to communicative paradigms, particularly in AFL and Islamic higher education contexts.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the persistence of grammar dominance within teaching materials -particularly in Islamic higher education contexts where religious, ideological, and institutional factors intersect- remains insufficiently explained.<sup>9</sup> This article advances the field by uniquely integrating insights from AFL pedagogy, curriculum studies, digital learning, and sociocultural analysis into a consolidated state-of-the-art framework, addressing a gap that has not been systematically explored in prior Scopus-indexed reviews.

This study addresses this gap and establishes its novelty by offering a state-of-the-art critical synthesis that (1) reconceptualizes the role of grammar within communicative material design, (2) integrates AFL pedagogy with CEFR-oriented frameworks and sociocultural perspectives, and (3) develops a context-sensitive model for Arabic teaching materials in higher education. Unlike previous studies that treat grammar and communication as competing paradigms, this study advances an integrative perspective in which grammatical knowledge serves as a strategic resource that enables effective communication. Teaching materials are treated as the central unit of analysis, based on their mediating role between curriculum policy, classroom practice, and learner experience.<sup>10</sup> Using a thematic-critical synthesis, the review examines pedagogical orientation, material design features, contextual embeddedness -particularly in non-Arab Islamic contexts- and the role of innovation, inclusivity, and affective mediation.<sup>11</sup> This approach enables analytical depth and theoretical positioning rather than descriptive aggregation.

Accordingly, the primary contribution of this article lies in offering the first consolidated state-of-the-art critical review of Arabic language teaching materials in higher education that explicitly foregrounds the grammar-

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<sup>8</sup> S Mohamed, "The Development of an Arabic Curriculum Framework Based on a Compilation of Salient Features from CEFR Level Descriptors," *Language Learning Journal* 51, no. 1 (2023): 33–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2021.1923781>; Farhah et al., "Redefining Arabic in the Global Era: A Critical Examination of Silsilat Al-Lisan Textbooks."

<sup>9</sup> N Edres, "Religion, Ideology, and Nation-Building in Jordanian Textbooks and Curricula for the Teaching of Arabic Language," *Languages Cultures Mediation* 8, no. 2 (2021): 81–100, <https://doi.org/10.7358/LCM-2021-002-EDRE>; A Columbu, "Decolonising Arabic Language Teaching: A Case Study," *Languages Cultures Mediation* 8, no. 2 (2021): 101–18, <https://doi.org/10.7358/LCM-2021-002-COLU>.

<sup>10</sup> Mohamed, "The Development of an Arabic Curriculum Framework Based on a Compilation of Salient Features from CEFR Level Descriptors."

<sup>11</sup> M Ritonga et al., "Analysis of Arabic Language Learning at Higher Education Institutions with Multi-Religion Students," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 8, no. 9 (2020): 4333–39, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080960>; H S Ghareib et al., "The Mediating Role of Academic Resilience in the Relationship Between Positive Emotions and Test Anxiety Among Muslim Undergraduate Students," *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal* 9, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.25217/0020269693000>.

communication transition within Islamic and AFL contexts. The study aims to (1) examine the persistence of grammar-centered materials, (2) analyze the emergence of communicative and hybrid designs, and (3) propose a theoretically grounded framework for aligning grammatical competence with communicative effectiveness in Arabic language teaching materials. By doing so, the article seeks to provide a conceptual foundation for developing Arabic language materials that balance linguistic rigor, communicative competence, and contextual legitimacy.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Reassessing the Limitations of Grammar-Centered Materials through Theoretical and Empirical Lenses**

This study adopts a qualitative systematic state-of-the-art review design, focusing specifically on teaching materials as the primary unit of analysis, rather than broadly examining curriculum, technology, or learner variables. The dataset consists of peer-reviewed studies indexed in Scopus (2020–2026), selected due to their rigorous indexing standards and relevance to AFL scholarship. While other databases such as Web of Science (WoS) provide complementary coverage, this study prioritizes Scopus to ensure consistency in source quality and thematic comparability. Nevertheless, this delimitation is acknowledged as a limitation and suggests the need for future multi-database synthesis.

To maintain analytical focus, this section deliberately limits its scope to one central dimension: the pedagogical orientation of teaching materials (grammar-centered vs communicative). Other aspects, such as digital tools or AI integration, are not treated as independent variables, but only discussed insofar as they reflect or reinforce pedagogical orientation. This focus addresses prior concerns about variable overextension and ensures alignment between the findings and the conclusions.

The review demonstrates that grammar-centered materials continue to dominate Arabic language teaching in higher education, despite sustained scholarly critique. Across Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) contexts, including Islamic universities in Indonesia, instructional resources remain heavily oriented toward explicit grammatical explanation, rule memorization, and decontextualized exercises.<sup>12</sup> Grammar sequencing frequently determines syllabus structure. At the same time, communicative functions and interactional tasks are treated as peripheral.

In Islamic higher education, this dominance is reinforced by the epistemological positioning of Arabic as a language of religious authority and textual access. Materials are often designed to support comprehension of classical texts rather than communicative use, privileging reading and writing skills over

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<sup>12</sup> Haris, "Teaching Reading of Arabic Language in Indonesia: Reconstruction of the Contents and Scope of Nahwu Science"; Farhah et al., "Redefining Arabic in the Global Era: A Critical Examination of Silsilat Al-Lisan Textbooks."

listening and speaking.<sup>13</sup> Assessment practices that emphasize written accuracy further consolidate grammar-first material design.

Empirical studies consistently associate grammar-centered materials with limited communicative confidence, reduced learner agency, and heightened speaking anxiety.<sup>14</sup> These outcomes suggest that the persistence of such materials reflects not only pedagogical inertia but also deeper assumptions about linguistic legitimacy in Arabic education.

Table 1. Core Characteristics of Grammar-Centered Arabic Teaching Materials

Aspect	Dominant Pattern
Focus	Explicit grammar rules
Skills	Reading & writing
Tasks	Drills, translation
Learner role	Passive recipient
Communication	Low

The findings of this review confirm that grammar-centered teaching materials continue to dominate Arabic language instruction in higher education, particularly within Islamic institutions and AFL contexts. From a theoretical perspective, this dominance reflects a structuralist and form-focused orientation that prioritizes linguistic competence narrowly defined as grammatical accuracy. While such an approach aligns with traditional Arabic linguistic scholarship and text-based pedagogy, it diverges significantly from contemporary theories of second language acquisition and communicative competence.

According to communicative competence theory, as conceptualized by Hymes and later elaborated in applied linguistics, effective language use encompasses not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. CEFR further operationalizes this view by framing language proficiency as the ability to perform communicative tasks in real-life contexts across integrated skills. However, as evidenced in the reviewed studies, grammar-centered Arabic materials often isolate grammatical forms from communicative functions, resulting in learners who possess declarative knowledge about the language but struggle to deploy it interactively.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ritonga et al., “Analysis of Arabic Language Learning at Higher Education Institutions with Multi-Religion Students”; A A Rekan et al., “Arabic Language Curriculum as a Foundation for Strengthening Religious Education in Public Higher Education,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 22, no. 1 (2025): 97–121, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v22i1.11340>; N Ejibadze, “Specificity of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language: University Education,” 2024, 241–49.

<sup>14</sup> Brosh, “Exploring Undergraduate Students’ Preferences for Oral Corrective Feedback in Arabic as a Foreign Language”; Faraj and Zawawi, “Unraveling Arabic Learning Challenges: A Case Study at SOAS.”

<sup>15</sup> Haris, “Teaching Reading of Arabic Language in Indonesia: Reconstruction of the Contents and Scope of Nahwu Science”; Ramadhan Jabal Primadana et al., “Development of Listening and Speaking Skills Teaching Materials Based on CEFR Level,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no.

Empirical evidence from higher education contexts reinforces this theoretical critique. Studies documenting learner outcomes consistently show that prolonged exposure to grammar-heavy materials correlates with limited speaking proficiency, weak listening comprehension, and heightened anxiety toward oral interaction.<sup>16</sup> In Islamic higher education, this issue is further compounded by assessment systems that privilege written grammatical accuracy, thereby reinforcing material designs that marginalize communicative use.<sup>17</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, this dominance reflects a structuralist orientation that equates linguistic competence with grammatical accuracy. However, communicative competence theory demonstrates that effective language use requires integrating grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies. The findings confirm that grammar-centered materials tend to isolate form from function, producing learners who possess declarative knowledge but cannot apply it in real communication.<sup>18</sup> Importantly, the findings do not support the elimination of grammar. Instead, they highlight a misalignment in its pedagogical function: grammar is treated as the goal rather than as a resource supporting meaning-making. This distinction is crucial, particularly in Arabic, where grammatical knowledge is necessary but insufficient for communicative effectiveness.

In Islamic higher education, grammar-centered materials are often justified on ideological and academic grounds, particularly to ensure accurate access to classical Islamic texts. However, the reviewed literature challenges the assumption that communicative approaches inherently undermine textual competence. On the contrary, studies indicate that overemphasis on grammatical

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2 (2024): 559–78, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.10904>; Rini Rini, Muhammad Arif Mustofa, and Kurnia Kurnia, “Using the Plotagon Application on Arabic Language Learning Media Design,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 7, no. 2 November (2023): 637–54, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v7i2.8446>.

<sup>16</sup> Güngenci and Yildiz, “Challenges in Listening and Speaking Skills for Arabic Language Pre-Service Teachers: A Correlational Study”; Brosh, “Exploring Undergraduate Students’ Preferences for Oral Corrective Feedback in Arabic as a Foreign Language.”

<sup>17</sup> T Musthofa, “CEFR-Based Policy in Arabic Language Teaching and Cultural Dimension in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education,” *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8, no. 2 (2022): 96–107, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911545>; Mohamed, “The Development of an Arabic Curriculum Framework Based on a Compilation of Salient Features from CEFR Level Descriptors.”

<sup>18</sup> Mohamed, “The Development of an Arabic Curriculum Framework Based on a Compilation of Salient Features from CEFR Level Descriptors”; R Raswan et al., “Developing a Competency-Based Arabic Curriculum to Foster Merdeka Belajar in Indonesian Madrasahs,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 3 (2025): 1881–1908, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i3.1930>; H A Al Kuhayli, K El Alaoui, and M A E Pilotti, “Critical Minds in Arabic and Islamic Studies Courses: A Whiff of Change,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 24, no. 3 (2021): 152–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12591>; S M Razman, Z Ismail, and W.M.A.S. Ismail, “Developing a Teaching Module on Arabic Vocabulary Based on the Four Strands Theory for Pre-University Students in Malaysia: A Needs Analysis,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 12, no. 11 (2022): 2263–73, <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1211.05>.

form without communicative context may hinder learners' ability to interpret and discuss religious texts in contemporary academic settings meaningfully.<sup>19</sup> This highlights a critical theoretical gap: grammar-centered materials conflate linguistic correctness with communicative adequacy, neglecting the functional dimension of language use emphasized in both communicative competence theory and CEFR.

Therefore, the limitations of grammar-centered materials are not merely practical but theoretical. They reflect a reduced conception of language learning that prioritizes form over use, accuracy over interaction, and transmission over mediation. Addressing these limitations requires not the elimination of grammar, but its reconceptualization as a resource for communication rather than an end. This reconceptualization forms the foundation for the communicative and hybrid material designs discussed in the next section.

Thus, the contribution of this analysis lies in clarifying the specific role of teaching materials (not curriculum or technology) as the key mediating factor shaping the grammar–communication relationship. By narrowing the analytical focus, this study provides a more precise account of how pedagogical orientation is operationalized within materials and how this affects communicative outcomes in AFL contexts.

### **Interpreting the Rise of Communicative and Hybrid Materials: Alignment with Communicative Competence and CEFR**

Alongside the persistence of grammar-centered resources, the literature identifies a growing emergence of communicative and hybrid teaching materials. These materials integrate functional language use, interactional tasks, and authentic texts, repositioning grammar as supportive rather than foundational.<sup>20</sup> Studies report positive effects on learner engagement and speaking confidence, particularly in AFL settings.<sup>21</sup>

However, the review indicates that fully communicative materials remain relatively limited. Most innovations adopt a hybrid orientation, combining structured grammar progression with communicative activities. This design reflects pragmatic adaptation to institutional expectations, learner beliefs, and

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<sup>19</sup> Al Kuhayli, El Alaoui, and Pilotti, "Critical Minds in Arabic and Islamic Studies Courses: A Whiff of Change?"; Rekan et al., "Arabic Language Curriculum as a Foundation for Strengthening Religious Education in Public Higher Education."

<sup>20</sup> Alharbi, "Communicative Language Teaching Approach in a Saudi Context: A Critical Appraisal"; n. Zulhannan et al., "Enhancing Communicative Arabic Teaching: Evaluating the Al-Arabiyah Baina Yadaik Model," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 15, no. 3 (2025): 318–35, <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2025-0100>.

<sup>21</sup> H Kamal, "Teaching Arabic Today: Challenges, Strategies, and Opportunities in Islamic Higher Education," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 24, no. 10 (2025): 644–59, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.10.31>.

assessment regimes, especially within Islamic higher education where grammatical knowledge retains symbolic and academic value.<sup>22</sup>

Digitalization plays a significant role in material innovation. E-campus platforms, mobile applications, and AI-generated content facilitate interaction and learner autonomy.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, several studies caution that technological enhancement often reproduces grammar-centered designs unless guided by a communicative framework.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, communicative and hybrid materials represent a transitional rather than transformative shift, signalling movement away from grammar dominance while remaining constrained by contextual realities.

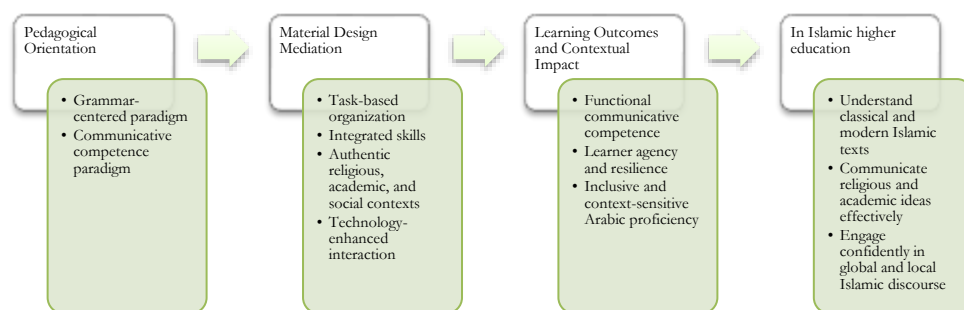


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Transition from Grammar-Centered to Communicative Arabic Teaching Materials

As illustrated in Figure 1, the shift from grammar-centered to communicative materials is mediated by material design choices that align with the pedagogical theory and the contextual demands of Islamic higher education. The emergence of communicative and hybrid teaching materials identified in the findings signals a gradual epistemological shift in Arabic language education. From a theoretical standpoint, these materials reflect increasing alignment with communicative competence frameworks and CEFR principles, particularly in their emphasis on meaning-making, interaction, and integrated skills.

<sup>22</sup> Rekan et al., “Arabic Language Curriculum as a Foundation for Strengthening Religious Education in Public Higher Education”; A A Rekan et al., “Embedding 21st Century Soft Skills in Islamic Higher Education,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2025): 318–35, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i2.232>.

<sup>23</sup> Ritonga et al., “The Effect of Technology on Arabic Language Learning in Higher Education”; Allaithy and Zaki, “Evaluation of AI-Generated Reading Comprehension Materials for Arabic Language Teaching”; S Yacout, “Engaging Students in an Online Arabic as a Foreign Language Course: Challenges and Solutions,” 2024, 103–32.

<sup>24</sup> U Hanifah, M Thoha, and H R B Haji Abdullah, “Management of Developing Interactive Multimedia-Based Arabic Teaching Materials: Enhancing Learning for Diverse Students at Indonesian Islamic Universities,” *Munaddhomah* 6, no. 1 (2025): 82–98, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v6i1.1469>.

Communicative materials operationalize language as social action rather than a static system of rules. Tasks such as role-plays, discussions, problem-solving activities, and authentic text engagement align closely with the CEFR's action-oriented approach, which views learners as social agents performing communicative tasks in specific domains. Empirical studies reviewed in this article demonstrate that materials incorporating such tasks foster higher engagement, pragmatic awareness, and perceived relevance among AFL learners.<sup>25</sup>

Hybrid materials -combining explicit grammar instruction with communicative practice- deserve particular attention. Rather than representing a transitional weakness, hybridity may reflect a contextually appropriate response to the unique demands of Arabic language teaching. In AFL and Islamic higher education contexts, learners often require grammatical scaffolding to navigate the complexity of Arabic morphology and syntax. Hybrid materials, when designed coherently, allow grammar to function to support communicative performance rather than as an isolated objective.<sup>26</sup>

However, the findings also reveal a critical limitation: many communicative elements remain peripheral. From a theoretical perspective, this suggests incomplete internalization of principles of communicative competence at the material design level. While communicative tasks are present, they often follow a grammar-driven sequencing, reinforcing a hierarchy in which form precedes meaning.<sup>27</sup> This sequencing contradicts the CEFR's emphasis on functional progression and task-based learning, where communicative needs determine linguistic focus.

In the context of Islamic higher education, communicative materials take on added significance. Studies show that when communicative tasks are embedded in religious, academic, or culturally relevant content, resistance to innovation diminishes.<sup>28</sup> This finding challenges the perceived dichotomy between communicative pedagogy and religious authenticity. Instead, it supports a theoretically grounded view that communicative competence includes the ability to discuss, interpret, and negotiate meaning within religious and academic discourses.

Moreover, communicative materials align closely with contemporary understandings of learner agency and affective engagement. Research indicates

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<sup>25</sup> Alharbi, "Communicative Language Teaching Approach in a Saudi Context: A Critical Appraisal"; Zuhannan et al., "Enhancing Communicative Arabic Teaching: Evaluating the Al-Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik Model."

<sup>26</sup> Kamal, "Teaching Arabic Today: Challenges, Strategies, and Opportunities in Islamic Higher Education"; Brosh, "Exploring Undergraduate Students' Preferences for Oral Corrective Feedback in Arabic as a Foreign Language."

<sup>27</sup> Siwiec, "Grammatical Redundancy and Metalanguage in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language."

<sup>28</sup> Rekan et al., "Embedding 21st Century Soft Skills in Islamic Higher Education"; Al Kuhayli, El Alaoui, and Pilotti, "Critical Minds in Arabic and Islamic Studies Courses: A Whiff of Change."

that learner-centered materials promote positive emotions, resilience, and collaborative learning (factors increasingly recognized as integral to successful language acquisition).<sup>29</sup> From a communicative competence perspective, affective readiness and willingness to communicate are essential conditions for meaningful language use.

Thus, the rise of communicative and hybrid materials represents a theoretically significant development. Yet, their transformative potential depends on whether communicative competence and CEFR principles are adopted as foundational design logics rather than supplementary features. This tension underscores the need for more systematic material frameworks, particularly in digitally mediated environments, as discussed in the following section.

### **Implications for Material Development in Islamic Higher Education: Toward an Integrated Communicative Framework**

The analysis indicates that the central challenge in Arabic material development is not the absence of innovation, but the misalignment between pedagogical orientation and material design logic. Grammar-centered materials continue to structure content, sequencing, and assessment, even when communicative elements are superficially incorporated. Consequently, material reform must prioritize reconfiguring design principles rather than merely adding of new components.

From a theoretical standpoint, an integrated communicative framework is required one that repositions grammar as a functional resource within meaning-oriented and task-based structures. This framework is grounded in communicative competence theory and CEFR's action-oriented approach, but must be adapted to the epistemological and institutional realities of Islamic higher education. Specifically, materials should: (1) organize content around communicative functions rather than grammatical categories, (2) integrate skills through task-based sequencing, and (3) embed grammar within authentic discourse contexts.

Importantly, this framework distinguishes clearly between material design and curriculum reform. While curriculum policies may advocate communicative competence, it is the material level that determines how such policies are enacted in classroom practice. The findings demonstrate that without material-level transformation, curriculum reform remains largely symbolic. Therefore, this study contributes by positioning teaching materials (not curriculum or technology) as the primary site of pedagogical change.

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<sup>29</sup> A M Albantani, A Madkur, and I F Rahmadi, "Agency in Online Foreign Language Learning Amidst the Covid-19 Outbreak," *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education* 23, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.1182781>; Ghareib et al., "The Mediating Role of Academic Resilience in the Relationship Between Positive Emotions and Test Anxiety Among Muslim Undergraduate Students."

Table 2. Conceptual Framework for Rethinking Arabic Language Teaching Materials in Higher Education

Dimension	Grammar-Centered Materials	Communicative-Oriented Materials	Theoretical Alignment	Implications for Islamic Higher Education
<b>View of Language</b>	Language as a fixed system of rules (šarf-naḥw)	Language as social action and meaning making	Structuralism vs. Communicative Competence	Shift from text-only mastery to functional religious–academic discourse
<b>Primary Learning Goal</b>	Grammatical accuracy and textual comprehension	Communicative competence across skills	Hymes’ communicative competence; CEFR action-oriented approach	Graduates able to discuss Islamic texts, ideas, and issues communicatively
<b>Material Organization</b>	Grammar-driven sequencing (rules → examples → drills)	Task- and function-driven sequencing	CEFR “can-do” descriptors	Curriculum coherence beyond exam-oriented grammar coverage
<b>Skill Integration</b>	Skills taught separately; dominance of reading and writing	Integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing	Integrated-skills pedagogy	Balanced development of oral and textual proficiency
<b>Role of Grammar</b>	Grammar as the central objective	Grammar as a communicative resource	Focus on form within meaning-focused tasks	Grammar supports understanding and expression of religious texts
<b>Learning Activities</b>	Decontextualized exercises and translation	Authentic tasks, interaction, collaboration	Task-Based Language Teaching	Active engagement with Islamic and academic content
<b>Learner Role</b>	Passive recipient of knowledge	Active social agent and meaning-maker	Sociocultural learning theory	Increased learner agency and confidence in Arabic use
<b>Affective Dimension</b>	Anxiety, low confidence, limited resilience	Positive emotions, engagement, resilience	Affective filter hypothesis; learner agency	Reduced anxiety in Arabic learning in Islamic institutions
<b>Technology Use</b>	Digital replication of grammar drills	Technology-mediated communicative interaction	CALL, AI-supported learning	Meaningful digital transformation, not cosmetic
<b>Inclusivity</b>	Uniform learner assumptions	Adaptive and inclusive design	Universal Design for Learning	Responsiveness to diverse learners (multilingual, SEN)

This review carries important implications for the development of materials in Islamic higher education, particularly in Indonesia and similar AFL contexts. Theoretically, they point to the need for an integrated framework that reconciles communicative competence, CEFR alignment, and the epistemological traditions of Arabic and Islamic studies.

Contextual factors, including digital tools and learner diversity, should be understood as mediating (not determining) elements. Technology, for instance,

can either reinforce grammar-centered practices or support communicative interaction depending on design logic.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, diverse learner profiles highlight the need for flexible, interaction-based materials but do not inherently define pedagogical orientation.<sup>31</sup>

Technology enhances access to authentic input and interaction but does not inherently guarantee communicative learning. Studies show that digital tools can either support communicative engagement or reinforce traditional grammar-focused practices, depending on pedagogical design.<sup>32</sup>

Learner diversity, particularly in Indonesian Islamic higher education, further exposes the limitations of grammar-centered materials. Multilingual, multi-religious, and special-needs learners benefit more from flexible, interaction-based resources that allow differentiation and contextual relevance.<sup>33</sup>

Affective dimensions also emerge as critical. Materials emphasizing interaction, meaning making, and learner choice are associated with increased agency, resilience, and reduced anxiety.<sup>34</sup> Importantly, communicative materials

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<sup>30</sup> Ritonga et al., “The Effect of Technology on Arabic Language Learning in Higher Education”; Allaithy and Zaki, “Evaluation of AI-Generated Reading Comprehension Materials for Arabic Language Teaching.”

<sup>31</sup> Rustamaji Rustamaji et al., “A Need Analysis for Developing Arabic Writing Materials: A Study at Higher Education Institution,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 1 May (2024): 255–82, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i1.9825>; Wiwik Prasetyo Ningsih et al., “The Designing of Teaching Materials by Using Mnemonic Music Techniques to Strengthen Vocabularies Memorizing,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (2024): 757–78, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.8934>; Ritonga et al., “Analysis of Arabic Language Learning at Higher Education Institutions with Multi-Religion Students”; Thohri and Nasri, “Designing an Arabic Language Curriculum Responsive to the Needs of Children with Disabilities in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia”; Siregar et al., “Arabic Writing Skills Teaching Materials Based on Graphemics for Autistic Students.”

<sup>32</sup> M Ritonga et al., “Enhancing Arabic Language Learning in Higher Education: Leveraging E-Campus as an Online Learning and Evaluation Platform,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 2 (2024): 491–516, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i2.1103>; Adel et al., “The Contribution of Smartphone Apps to Develop Teaching the Arabic Language ‘Arabic Is My Language’s App’ as a Sample.”

<sup>33</sup> M Thohri and U Nasri, “Designing an Arabic Language Curriculum Responsive to the Needs of Children with Disabilities in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia,” *Islamic Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2024): 405–23; S D P Siregar et al., “Arabic Writing Skills Teaching Materials Based on Graphemics for Autistic Students,” *Asian Education and Development Studies* 14, no. 3 (2025): 495–517, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-08-2024-0171>; A Facchin, “From Teaching Non-Arabs Arabic to Arabization in 1950s Sudan1,” 2025, 291–309, [https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463728249\\_CH8](https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463728249_CH8); M Z Al Farisi et al., “Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of ‘Bandung,’” *Asian Education and Development Studies* 13, no. 2 (2024): 134–49, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-07-2023-0082>.

<sup>34</sup> Albantani, Madkur, and Rahmadi, “Agency in Online Foreign Language Learning Amidst the Covid-19 Outbreak”; Ghareib et al., “The Mediating Role of Academic Resilience in the Relationship Between Positive Emotions and Test Anxiety Among Muslim Undergraduate

gain greater acceptance in Islamic higher education when aligned with religious, academic, or professional goals.

In Islamic higher education, effective material development must also ensure alignment with sociocultural and epistemological norms. Communicative materials are more likely to be accepted when they integrate religious discourse, academic communication, and real-life language use.<sup>35</sup> This finding challenges the assumption that communicative approaches conflict with religious or textual objectives. Instead, it supports an integrated view in which grammatical knowledge facilitates meaningful engagement with both classical texts and contemporary discourse.

Finally, the study identifies a critical gap in the absence of a coherent, theory-driven framework for Arabic teaching materials comparable to CEFR-informed models in European language education.<sup>36</sup> Addressing this gap requires moving beyond fragmented innovations toward systematically designed materials that align grammar, communication, and context within a unified pedagogical logic.

Thus, the primary contribution of this section lies in articulating a material-centered, theoretically grounded framework that clarifies how communicative competence can be operationalized in Arabic teaching materials within Islamic higher education contexts.

## Conclusion

This study addressed three research questions concerning Arabic teaching materials in higher education. First, it confirms that such materials remain predominantly grammar-centered, particularly within Islamic contexts, where rule-based sequencing, explicit explanation, and decontextualized exercises still dominate. Second, although communicative and hybrid materials are increasingly present, their implementation remains largely partial, with communicative elements added rather than structurally integrated. This results in a persistent gap

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Students”; Z Shweiry, *Arabizi as a Learning and Teaching Resource: A Linguistic Study of Arabic in a Foreign Language Classroom*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-8594-0>.

<sup>35</sup> Rekan et al., “Arabic Language Curriculum as a Foundation for Strengthening Religious Education in Public Higher Education”; Aisyah Cahyani and Kholisin Kholisin, “Developing ArVo: Augmented Reality-Based Application to Improve Arabic Vocabulary Mastery,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Babasa Arab* 6, no. 2 November (2022): 465–82, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v6i2.4798>; Asep Maulana and Ahmad Tarajjil Ma’suq, “The Development of Google Sites-Based Learning Multimedia to Enhance Students’<sup>TM</sup> Competence in Vocabulary Translation,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Babasa Arab* 8, no. 1 May (2024): 115–46, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i1.8776>; Fateh Al Muhibbin et al., “Educators’ and Learners’ Responses to Optimising the Development of Arabic Teaching Module Based on the Merdeka Curriculum,” *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Babasa Arab* 8, no. 1 May (2024): 209–34, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i1.9878>.

<sup>36</sup> Mohamed, “The Development of an Arabic Curriculum Framework Based on a Compilation of Salient Features from CEFR Level Descriptors”; Kamal, “Teaching Arabic Today: Challenges, Strategies, and Opportunities in Islamic Higher Education.”

between communicative policy frameworks and actual material design. Third, the findings demonstrate that grammar should not be eliminated but repositioned as a functional resource within communicative, task-based, and meaning-oriented learning environments. Effective Arabic communication emerges when grammatical knowledge supports, rather than constrains, meaning - making.

Taken together, these findings highlight that the central issue lies in the misalignment between pedagogical orientation and material design. This study contributes by proposing a material-centered integrated communicative framework that aligns grammar, communication, and context within Islamic higher education. Practically, it calls for a structural redesign of teaching materials, moving beyond additive innovation toward communicative design principles. Future research should expand data sources beyond Scopus and empirically test this framework across diverse AFL contexts.

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