Arabic Language Education in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract	This study examines the complex relationship between globalization and Arabic language education within Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs). This study employs a qualitative approach with library research methodology. Findings reveal that globalization presents dual impacts: challenges, including digital divides affecting 55% of rural Islamic institutions, the commodification of education threatening formative spiritual goals, and curriculum westernization often misaligned with classical literacy objectives; and opportunities through glocalization approaches integrating modern pedagogies with traditional goals. An analysis of successful programs at IIUM Malaysia, Gontor Indonesia, and Qatar Foundation identifies common success factors, including institutional vision, adequate resource allocation, qualified faculty, and the contextual adaptation of global practices to local needs. The study demonstrates that technology integration through blended learning, mobile applications, and open educational resources can enhance accessibility while maintaining pedagogical quality when implemented thoughtfully. Results show Arabic language education possesses strategic potential as a bridge between Islamic heritage preservation and global engagement through literacy-first approaches, culturally relevant materials, and positioning multilingual competence as an asset for global citizenship. This research contributes to the discourse on educational decolonization and heritage language revitalization, offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, institutions, educators, and researchers to enhance the quality, equity, and relevance of Arabic language education in the 21st century.
Keywords	Globalization; Arabic language education; Islamic higher education; globalization.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century marks a profound transformation in global education. Globalization, defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities (Paudel, 2022), has fundamentally altered educational institutions. International higher education enrollment reached 264 million in 2024, up from 100 million in 2000 (Dennis, 2022), reflecting democratization of access while introducing complexities in maintaining quality and institutional identity. Within the Islamic world, this transformation presents unique epistemological dilemmas. Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) face pressure to participate in the global knowledge economy while maintaining their mission of preserving Islamic intellectual traditions and character formation (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024). Arabic language education stands at the crossroads of this tension, serving as the primary medium for transmitting both classical and contemporary Islamic knowledge.

Arabic is not merely a communication tool but a repository of civilization with integral epistemological, liturgical, and cultural functions (Ridwan, 2023). The ability to read classical Arabic texts constitutes a prerequisite for accessing Islamic scholarship, from tafsir and hadith to philosophy and Sufism. However, in an era dominated by English as the lingua franca of science (Allaithy et al., 2024), Arabic-language education faces critical questions about its relevance and contribution to contemporary Muslim identity. Recent scholarship highlights multifaceted challenges facing Arabic language education. Yusuf (2024) demonstrates that Arabic programs at Western universities are struggling with declining enrollment despite geopolitical interest in the Middle East. Abourehab & Azaz (2023) argue that heritage Arabic learners face unique challenges negotiating linguistic identities across diasporic contexts, requiring pedagogical approaches that recognize sacred and cultural dimensions beyond purely communicative functions. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural vulnerabilities, particularly concerning digital infrastructure and pedagogical preparedness for online learning (Kummitha et al., 2021).

Contemporary debates in applied linguistics increasingly recognize limitations of applying Western-developed methodologies uncritically to non-Western contexts (Makoni et al., 2024). This critique is particularly salient for Arabic language education, where communicative language teaching approaches may not align with learners' primary goals of accessing classical religious texts (Dadan Mardani & Isop Syafei, 2025). Furthermore, Arabic diglossia adds complexity to pedagogical considerations (Amin & Badreddine, 2020), as learners navigate between Modern Standard Arabic

and colloquial dialects with distinct social functions. This study seeks to contribute to scholarly understanding of how Arabic language education within IHEIs can strategically respond to globalization pressures. Rather than viewing globalization as an inexorable force demanding wholesale adoption or defensive resistance, this research adopts a framework of critical engagement recognizing both threats and opportunities. The concept of glocalization Çakmaklı et al., 2017) offers a productive lens for analyzing how global forces can be selectively appropriated and adapted to serve local needs and values.

The significance of this research extends beyond immediate concerns of Arabic language educators and IHEIs. As debates about linguistic imperialism, educational decolonization, and multilingual futures intensify globally, the case of Arabic language education offers valuable insights into how heritage languages can maintain vitality within increasingly interconnected educational systems. The strategies and frameworks developed may have broader applicability to contexts where linguistic and cultural preservation intersect with pressures toward globalized educational standardization.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with library research methodology. Qualitative methodology is chosen due to the complex, multidimensional nature of globalization and education, which requires a deep understanding of contexts, meanings, and processes (Netolicky & Barnes, 2018). The descriptive-analytical approach enables not only the description of actual conditions but also the critical analysis of dynamics, patterns, and implications. This research utilizes secondary data from multiple sources. Primary sources include policy documents and reports from international organizations, including (*Global Education Monitoring Report 2023* 2023, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2024), OECD Education at a Glance 2023 (*Equity and Inclusion in Education*, 2023), World Bank Education Statistics, and the Amic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) reports. Academic literature comprises internationally indexed journals from Scopus and Web of Science in the fields of Islamic education, Arabic language teaching, and educational globalization; dissertations from leading universities; and academic books from reputable publishers.

Statistical data derive from student enrollment figures at IHEIs from Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Higher Education Database (PDDikti), internet penetration and technology

access data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and university ranking data from QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education. Published empirical regional studies examining IHEIs in Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, and other Muslim-majority countries inform the analysis, along with case studies documenting innovations in Arabic language education. Data analysis proceeds through several stages. Thematic content analysis (Ritonga et al., 2020) examines policy documents, international organization reports, and academic literature to identify significant themes related to challenges and opportunities for Arabic language education in globalization contexts. Descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data on student enrollment, digital divides, and other educational indicators identifies trends, patterns, and disparities by calculating means, medians, percentages, and growth rates.

Comparative analysis examines differences across regional contexts, contrasting Indonesia with the Middle East and Southeast Asia with South Asia to identify universal patterns and contextual variations in responses to globalization. Triangulation of data sources and analytical methods enhances the validity and reliability of convergences (Noblwith convergence, wiconvergenceoss of multiple sources indicating limitations must be acknowledged. This research relies solely on secondary data, without primary data collection through interviews or observation, limiting the depth of understanding of the subjective experiences of educational actors. Geographic coverage remains limited to available literature, potentially biasing toward more extensively researched contexts such as Indonesia and the Middle East. The dynamics of globalization and education change rapidly, and the findings represent a snapshot that may have evolved by the time of publication. Despite these limitations, systematic analysis of diverse secondary sources enables robust insights into the state and prospects of Arabic language education amid globalizing forces.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

UNESCO (2024) data reveal dramatic growth in global higher education participation, with the Gross Enrollment Ratio increasing from 19% in 2000 to 42% in 2024, reflecting significant democratization of access. However, this growth remains geographically uneven, with OECD countries averaging 75% GER while South Asian and Sub-Saharan African nations stay below 30% (Valavanidis, 2025; Naik et al., 2024; Vieira do Nascimento et al., 2022). Within the Muslim world,

higher education growth has been pronounced, with Indonesia experiencing a rise in student enrollment from 3.5 million in 2000 to 8.8 million in 2023 (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, Riset, 2025). IHEIs contribute approximately 20% of Indonesia's total student population.

The proliferation of global university rankings represents a significant manifestation. Rankings such as the QS World University Rankings, the Times Higher Education Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities exert substantial influence on perceptions, international student flows, and funding allocation (Shahjahan et al., 2022). However, criticism reveals structural bias toward Global North universities and English-medium institutions (Tennant, 2020). IHEIs generally do not appear in these rankings because they are us on Arabic-language publications not indexed in major databases, missions that differ from those of Western research universities, and resource limitations for internationalization. Leading IHEIs have begun efforts to increase global visibility, with Al-Azhar University ranking 551-600 in the QS World University Rankings 2021, and Indonesians are increasingly in the regional rankings.

Despite digital technologies promising democratization of educational access, the digital divide remains a significant barrier. The digital divide encompasses infrastructure access (first-level divide), digital skills (second-level divide), and the capacity to use technology productively (third-level divide) (Aissaoui, 2022).

Table 1. Digital Access Disparities in Islamic Higher Education Contexts

Indicator	Indonesia (Java-Bali)	Indonesia (Papua)	Rural Pesantren Areas	Urban IHEI Areas
Internet Penetration Rate	86%	42%	<45%	>75%
Functional LMS Availability	60%	25%	30%	65%
Comprehensive Digital Content	45%	15%	20%	50%
Adequate Connection Speed	70%	35%	40%	75%

Source: Compiled from APJII (2023), Directorate General of Islamic Education 2022, and Haq et al. (2024)

The COVID-19 pandemic forced sudden transitions to online learning, brutally exposing these gaps. Research by Haq et al. (2024) found that students at IHEIs from low-income families and rural areas experience difficulties with online Arabic language learning, leading to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates. A 2022 survey by the Directorate General of Islamic Education reveals that only 45% of IHEIs have fully functional Learning Management Systems, and only 30% have comprehensive digital content for Arabic language learning (Ismail et al., 2023).

Infrastructure limitations reflect not only technical issues but also resource-allocation priorities. Many IHEIs face significant budget constraints, forcing trade-offs between technology investment versus faculty salary increases or physical facility development. One of neoliberal globalization's most controversial impacts is the commodification of education—the transformation of education from a public good to a private commodity (Lynch, 2006; Lyons, 2020). Within Arabic language education contexts, commodification manifests in: Proliferation of commercial courses promising rapid fluency with superficial methodologies; Credential inflation through increasing emphasis on certification like TOEFL that may not correlate with actual ability to understand complex classical texts; Privatization through expensive special class offerings creating stratified access based on economic capacity

Commodification drives the instrumentalization of education—reducing it to a mere means of economic advancement, neglecting deeper formative purposes such as character formation, wisdom development, and virtue cultivation, which are central to Islamic educational traditions (Mahmudulhassan et al., 2024). In traditional Arabic language education, language learning was inseparable from moral and spiritual education, with studying grammar, Reading classical texts, and memorizing the Quran viewed as spiritual exercises forming discipline, patience, and humility (Siregar, 2025). Eldin (2015) critiques utilitarian reductionism in modern Arabic language education, where philosophically and spiritually reformative aspects are neglected in favor of behaviorally measurable communicative competencies. This critique resonates with broader critiques of testing culture and measurement mania in global education (Corson, 2000).

Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching fields that dominate Arabic language teaching discourse are primarily developed in Western contexts, based on epistemological, psychological, and pedagogical assumptions that may not be fully applicable in Islamic educational contexts (Taha-Thomure, 2008; Astuti et al., 2023). Communicative Language Teaching, highly influential in foreign language teaching, is based on the concept of communicative competence (Mart, 2017). However, for Arabic learning serving religious purposes, learners generally do not require oral communication skills but rather need the ability to read and understand complex written texts (Amrina et al., 2022). Uncritical adoption of CLT methodologies in these contexts can result in curricula that fail to match learners' actual needs.

(Shendy, 2022) proposes a literacy-first approach better suited to Arabic learning contexts for academic and religious purposes outside the Arab world. This approach prioritizes the development

of Reading comprehension and textual analysis skills over oral production abilities, aligning more closely with traditional Islamic educational emphases on accessing and interpreting authoritative texts (Abdallaoui Maan, 2021). Postcolonial perspectives critique the uncritical application of concepts from the Global North to the Global South, producing linguistic imperialism (Levisen, 2022). Recent scholarship emphasizes the need for developing indigenous theoretical frameworks for understanding Arabic language education that draw on Arabic linguistic traditions and Islamic educational philosophy rather than merely adapting Western models (Ahmed, 2018).

Despite serious challenges, strategic opportunities exist that IHEIs can leverage through glocalization approaches: Integrating modern methodologies with traditional goals by adopting evidence-based teaching techniques from applied linguistics, including spaced repetition, task-based learning, and formative assessment, while maintaining traditional goals such as classical text Reading ability and character formation (B. Beribe). Creating Arabic learning materials using contexts and content relevant to contemporary Muslim students' lives rather than relying solely on textbooks developed in the Middle East for Arab contexts. Materials can incorporate examples from Indonesian Muslim daily life, texts from Nusantara Muslim scholars, and content addressing contemporary issues facing global Muslims (Mutiani et al., 2023).

Technology offers opportunities to enhance the accessibility and quality of Arabic language education. The development and sharing of Open Educational Resources can democratize access to high-quality materials (A. Rani et al., 2023). Blended learning models combining online and offline learning provide flexibility while maintaining personal interactions meaningful for language learning (Tawil, 2018; Ahmad, 2021). Mobile learning capitalizes on high smartphone penetration, with 85% penetration according to APJII 2023 (Darwin, 2025). Mobile applications for Arabic language learning can reach populations lacking computer or broadband internet access (Bradley et al., 2023). Artificial intelligence and adaptive learning technologies enable personalized learning experiences (Akavova et al., 2023; Gligorea et al., 2023).

Table 2. Glocalization Strategies for Arabic Language Education in IHEIs

Dimension	Global Elements	Local Adaptations	Implementation Examples
Curriculum Design	Task-based learning, CEFR framework, learning outcomes approach	Classical text literacy, character formation, and Islamic epistemology	IIUM integrated curriculum, Gontor immersive environment
Pedagogical Methods	Communicative approach, technology-enhanced learning, formative	Sorogan/bandongan methods, memorization, balagha tradition	Blended learning models, literacy-first approaches

	assessment		
Learning Materials	Multimedia resources, digital platforms, and authentic materials	Contextualized content, Nusantara Islamic texts, local examples	Culturally relevant textbooks, mobile apps with Islamic content
Assessment Practices	Standards-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment	Textual interpretation, oral recitation, character evaluation	Comprehensive assessment including religious literacy
Technology Integration	LMS, CALL/MALL applications, AI tutoring systems	Offline resources, low-bandwidth solutions, open-source tools	Mobile-first Design, progressive web apps, OER repositories

Source: Synthesized from B. Beribe (2023), Achruh et al. 224, (Mutiani et al. (2023), and case study analyses

The marginalization of Arabic as a medium for contemporary academic knowledge production is partly due to scientific monolingualism favoring English (Berthoud & Gajo, 2020). Strategies include: Systematically encouraging Arabic-language academic publication through faculty incentives; Establishing high-quality, peer-reviewed, open-access Arabic-language journals (Elgamri et al., 2023); and Systematic programs for translating important academic works between English and Arabic (Abdelwahab, 2022). Globalization paradoxically creates both homogenization and awareness of the value of diversity and pluralism. Arabic language ability can be positioned as an asset for global citizenship and intercultural competence, increasingly valued in global educational discourse (Patricia Diane Mouboua et al., 2024; Pashby, 2008).

IIUM provides a successful example of integrating Arabic language education within a globally oriented IHEI. Key features include: Mandatory Arabic language courses for all students regardless of major; Communicative Approach adapted for Islamic learning contexts; Content-based instruction where Arabic is taught through various disciplines; Well-equipped Language Learning Centers; Comprehensive assessment covering linguistic competence, cultural competence, and ability to access Islamic texts (Haron et al., 2010; Yusuf, 2024). Gontor represents a modern pesantren model successfully integrating traditional Islamic education with modern methodologies: an Immersive Arabic environment with required use of Arabic or English in daily life; Direct Method emphasizing oral proficiency from the beginning; Integration of classical Islamic texts with contemporary Arabic literature; Produces graduates proficient in Arabic who become educators throughout Indonesia (Muhammad Heriyudanta, 2022). Qatar Foundation's Arabic Language Institute exemplifies the effective use of resources to create world-class Arabic language programs. The Institute develops comprehensive curricula from beginner to advanced levels, employs cutting-edge technology, including virtual reality for immersive learning, conducts research on Arabic

language pedagogy and publishes findings, provides training for Arabic language teachers from around the world, and hosts international conferences on Arabic language education (Manan & Nasri, 2024). While most IHEIs cannot match Qatar Foundation's resource levels, the Institute demonstrates what becomes possible with adequate investment and strategic vision.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Successful Arabic Language Education Programs

Success Factor	IIUM (Malaysia)	Gontor (Indonesia)	Qatar Foundation Institute
Institutional Vision	Integration of Arabic across all programs	Immersive bilingual environment	World-class Arabic education center
Resource Allocation	Moderate-high, government-supported	Moderate, self-sustaining	Very high, foundation-funded
Faculty Quality	Qualified PhDs from Arab universities	Native speakers and pesantren graduates	International experts, researchers
Pedagogical Approach	Adapted communicative, content-based	Direct method, classical texts	Research-based, technology-enhanced
Technology Integration	Modern LMS, language labs	Moderate technology use	Cutting-edge VR, AI systems
Assessment System	Comprehensive, multiple dimensions	Classical + modern competencies	Standards-based, international frameworks
Key Outcome	Functional proficiency for Islamic studies	High oral and classical literacy	Advanced proficiency, teacher training
Transferability	High for other IHEIs	High for boarding schools	Moderate due to resource requirements

Source: Compiled from Haron et al. (2010), Yusuf (2024), Muhammad Heriyudanta (2022), and Manan & Nasri (2024)

Standard features of successful programs include: Clear institutional vision and leadership commitment; Adequate resource allocation for facilities, materials, and faculty development; Qualified and motivated faculty with appropriate pedagogical training; Integration of traditional goals with modern methodologies; Use of technology as an enabler rather than a replacement for human interaction; Commitment to continuous improvement through assessment and feedback.

Discussion

The findings reveal fundamental tensions between global standardization pressures and local contextual needs in Arabic language education at IHEIs. International university rankings, while influential in shaping institutional prestige and resource flows, demonstrate structural biases that systematically disadvantage IHEIs. The challenge extends beyond mere metric gaming to more profound questions about institutional identity and mission. Critical questions emerge regarding the extent to which IHEIs should adopt metrics that may misalign with their fundamental missions (Siler & Larivière, 2022).

The digital divide findings expose how technological solutions, often presented as universally beneficial, can paradoxically deepen educational inequalities when implemented without attention to infrastructure disparities and resource constraints. The stark contrasts between Java-Bali and Papua, or between urban and rural pesantren areas, demonstrate that technology is not a neutral tool but one whose effects are mediated by existing socioeconomic structures. Without systematic intervention from government and stakeholders, this digital divide will continue to widen inequality in access to quality Arabic-language education (Aini, 2025; Ritonga et al., 2022).

The commodification and instrumentalization of Arabic language education represent perhaps the most philosophically challenging dimension of globalization's impact. The transformation of education from formative experience to consumable product threatens to hollow out the spiritual and moral dimensions central to Islamic educational philosophy. However, simple resistance to all forms of measurement and accountability is neither possible nor desirable in contemporary contexts where transparency and demonstrated outcomes are legitimate stakeholder expectations. The challenge lies in developing assessment and accountability frameworks that capture the multidimensional nature of Arabic language learning—including not only linguistic competence but also textual interpretation, ethical formation, and spiritual development—in ways that resist reductionist pressures while remaining comprehensible to contemporary stakeholders (ElMeftahy, 2025). This requires creative thinking about what constitutes evidence of educational quality beyond standardized test scores and employment rates.

The case studies demonstrate that successful programs integrate multiple forms of assessment, combining traditional evaluations of classical text comprehension and oral recitation with modern competency-based assessments. This both-and approach, rather than either-or thinking, represents a form of glocalization that honors traditional values while engaging productively with contemporary expectations. The epistemological challenges identified in the findings point toward the necessity of what might be termed epistemological decolonization in Arabic language education. The uncritical adoption of Western pedagogical frameworks, particularly Communicative Language Teaching, in contexts where learner needs and institutional missions differ substantially from those of their originating contexts, constitutes a form of epistemic violence that can obscure indigenous knowledge traditions and pedagogical wisdom.

The literacy-first approach represents more than a methodological alternative; it signifies an assertion of the legitimacy of non-Western educational priorities and learning goals (Zondani, 2025;

Young, 2002). Similarly, the call for developing indigenous theoretical frameworks drawing on Arabic linguistic traditions and Islamic educational philosophy (Astuti et al., 2023) challenges the assumed universality of Western applied linguistics paradigms. However, epistemological decolonization does not mean complete rejection of all insights from global applied linguistics. Instead, it requires critical engagement—taking what is useful while rejecting what is inappropriate, and always centering local contexts, needs, and knowledge traditions in curriculum and pedagogical decision-making. The glocalization strategies outlined in Table 2 operationalize this balanced approach across multiple dimensions of educational practice.

The findings regarding technology integration reveal both significant opportunities and considerable risks. Technology can democratize access to high-quality Arabic-language learning resources through Open Educational Resources, enable personalized learning through adaptive systems, and facilitate authentic language use through digital communication platforms. Mobile learning, in particular, given Indonesia's 85% smartphone penetration (APJII 2023 (Darwin, 2025), offers pathways to reach populations lacking computer or broadband access. However, the digital divide data demonstrate that technology can also exacerbate existing inequalities if implemented without attention to access disparities. The principles of universal Design for learning and a commitment to open educational resources become crucial for ensuring that technology serves equity rather than undermines it. Blended learning models that combine online and offline elements represent a middle path that can leverage technology's benefits while maintaining the human interaction and guidance essential for language learning.

The case studies reveal that the most successful programs use technology as an enabler and enhancer of learning rather than as a replacement for traditional pedagogical relationships. QatFoundation's cutting-edge virtual reality applications and IIUM's well-equipped language labs supplement and enhance, rather than supplant, direct teacher-student interaction and classical pedagogical methods such as sorogan and bandongan. Based on an analysis of challenges and opportunities, several principles can be formulated for developing Arabic-language education models that are resilient and relevant. The principle of dual orientation holds that Arabic language education must maintain rootedness in tradition and openness to innovation, meaning retention of classical text literacy goals and spiritual-moral formation while embracing modern pedagogical approaches and technologies in a both-and rather than either-or framework.

The principle of contextual adaptation recognizes that no one-size-fits-all approach exists. Curricula and methodologies must adapt to specific contexts, including learning goals, learner backgrounds, and available resources. Uncritical adoption of foreign models must be avoided in favor of thoughtful adaptation. The principle of technological integration emphasizes that technology should be integrated thoughtfully as an enabler rather than a replacement for human interaction and guidance. Blended learning models represent the way forward, combining the advantages of online and offline learning. The principle of quality and equity requires that quality improvement efforts be accompanied by attention to equity. Technological solutions accessible only to privileged populations will worsen inequality. Universal Design for Learning and a commitment to open educational resources can help ensure that high-quality Arabic language education becomes accessible to all (Almeqdad et al., 2023). The principle of research-informed practice holds that Arabic language education practice should be informed by research from both global applied linguistics and context-specific research. This requires investment in research capacity at IHEIs and cultivation of evidence-based practice culture (Manan & Nasri, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This research finds that globalization exerts profound impacts on Arabic language education in Islamic higher education institutions, creating serious challenges such as digital divides, commodification of education, westernization of curricula, and marginalization of Arabic in global knowledge production, while simultaneously opening strategic opportunities through glocalization approaches that integrate modern methodologies with traditional goals, leverage technology for learning accessibility, and revitalize Arabic as a language of knowledge production. Case studies from IIUM, Gontor, and Qatar Foundation demonstrate that no single universal model exists; success depends on contextual adaptation that is sensitive to local needs while maintaining a clear vision, adequate resources, qualified faculty, and a commitment to continuous improvement. The key finding reveals that Arabic language education can function as a bridge between preservation of Islamic identity and engagement with global modernity, where Islamic higher education institutions need not view globalization as a threat requiring resistance or complete surrender, but rather can adopt proactive and strategic stances to leverage globalization for the enrichment and revitalization of Arabic language education.

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