

The Development of Arabic Language Education in the Digital Age: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: *This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aimed at mapping the development of Arabic language education in the digital era over the past decade (2014–2024). Guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), this review analyzed 42 peer-reviewed articles selected from an initial pool of 187 studies identified across Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and the national SINTA journal portal. Thematic synthesis revealed four major themes: (1) the integration of digital platforms and mobile applications in Arabic language instruction; (2) the effectiveness of blended learning and e-learning approaches for developing maharah lughawiyah (Arabic language skills); (3) the design and validation of gamification-based digital learning media; and (4) systemic challenges in implementing educational technology within Arabic language education contexts in Indonesia. Findings indicate a sharp increase in digital technology research following the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), which catalyzed a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered, technology-mediated instruction. This review concludes that while digitalization presents significant opportunities for Arabic language education, persistent challenges, particularly educators' digital literacy gaps, unequal digital infrastructure, and a scarcity of contextually relevant Arabic digital content, must be addressed systemically to ensure equitable and effective learning outcomes.*

Keywords: *Arabic Language Education; Digital Era; Systematic Literature Review; PRISMA; Educational Technology.*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the six official languages of the United Nations and holds a uniquely important position in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, where it functions simultaneously as the language of religious worship, Islamic scholarship, and international communication with the Arab world. With over 24,000 Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and thousands of madrasah institutions across the archipelago (Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, 2022), the scale of Arabic language instruction in Indonesia is unparalleled in the non-Arab world. Yet, for decades, Arabic teaching methods have remained predominantly rooted in classical,

teacher-centered approaches that are increasingly misaligned with the learning expectations and technological realities of twenty-first century learners [1].

The global proliferation of digital technology has fundamentally disrupted traditional educational paradigms [2]. The emergence of Education 4.0, characterized by the seamless integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into all dimensions of teaching and learning, has compelled educational institutions, including those dedicated to Arabic language instruction, to adapt their pedagogical frameworks. This transformation accelerated dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, which forced an unprecedented, near-instantaneous migration of learning activities to digital platforms, exposing both the latent potential and the systemic vulnerabilities of digital readiness across Indonesian Arabic education institutions.

Despite the rapid pace of these developments, a comprehensive and systematic mapping of research trends, empirical evidence, and thematic findings in digital Arabic language education in Indonesia remains largely absent from the literature [3]. Existing studies tend to be narrowly scoped, examining a single application, a particular digital method, or a specific institutional context, without synthesizing evidence across the broader research landscape. There is a compelling need for a rigorous, transparent, and replicable synthesis that can provide educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers with an evidence-based panoramic view of the field.

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is uniquely suited to address this gap. Unlike narrative or scoping reviews that are vulnerable to selection bias, an SLR employs an explicit, pre-specified protocol to identify, screen, evaluate, and synthesize all available evidence relevant to a defined research question [4]. By adhering to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines [5], this study ensures methodological rigor, reproducibility, and transparency throughout the review process.

This review is guided by four research questions: (RQ1) What are the temporal publication trends in digital Arabic language education research in Indonesia from 2014 to 2024? (RQ2) Which digital technologies and platforms have been most extensively investigated in Arabic language education research? (RQ3) How effective are various digital approaches in developing the four Arabic language skills (maharah lughawiyah)? (RQ4) What are the primary systemic challenges confronting the implementation of digital technology in Arabic language education in Indonesia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arabic Language Education in the Indonesian Context

The history of Arabic language education in Indonesia is deeply intertwined with the spread of Islam since the thirteenth century. Traditionally conducted within the pesantren system through methodologies such as sorogan (individual tutoring) and bandongan (communal reading), Arabic instruction was primarily oriented toward the comprehension of classical religious texts [6]. The twentieth century saw a gradual formalization and modernization of Arabic education through the establishment of madrasah curricula, state Islamic universities (UIN/IAIN/STAIN), and national education standards. Today, Arabic is taught from the elementary to the university level within the Islamic education system, making Indonesia one of the largest environments for formal Arabic instruction globally [7].

Conceptualizing the Digital Era in Education

The digital era in education, often conceptualized under the rubrics of Education 4.0 or the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), is characterized by the pervasive integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), and immersive media into teaching and learning processes. [8], [9], [10] identify three defining features of digital-era education: (a) connectivity, enabling borderless access to learning resources; (b) collaboration, facilitated through digital platforms that support multi-directional interaction; and (c) creativity, empowered by tools for digital content production. Together, these features reposition the teacher from a sole knowledge authority to a facilitator, curator, and co-learner.

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL)

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is a subfield of applied linguistics and language education that investigates how digital technologies can be leveraged to support the acquisition of target languages. Drawing on theoretical foundations from [11] Input Hypothesis, [12] Zone of Proximal Development, and [13] Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, TELL research has demonstrated that well-designed digital media can reduce cognitive load, increase comprehensible input, and create authentic communicative contexts that are difficult to replicate in traditional classroom settings [14]. The application of TELL principles to Arabic, with its morphological complexity, diglossia, and non-Latin script, presents both unique affordances and distinctive challenges [15].

Systematic Literature Review and the PRISMA Protocol

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is a secondary research method that uses systematic, explicit, and reproducible procedures to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners [16]. The PRISMA 2020 statement Page et al., 2021, which provides a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram, serves as the gold standard for reporting SLRs in health, social, and educational sciences. Thematic synthesis, the analytical approach employed in this review, enables the construction of new interpretive frameworks from the themes identified across individual primary studies [17], [18].

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design following the PRISMA 2020 protocol. The review protocol was developed prior to data collection and registered to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Two independent reviewers conducted all stages of screening, full-text assessment, and data extraction to minimize individual bias, with disagreements resolved through discussion and, where necessary, consultation with a third reviewer [19].

PICO Research Framework

The research questions were operationalized using an adapted PICO (Population,

Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework [2]. Population (P), students and educators engaged in Arabic language learning in Indonesia; Intervention (I), the use of digital technology in Arabic language instruction; Comparison (C), conventional (non-digital) Arabic language instruction; Outcome (O), effectiveness, efficiency, motivation, engagement, and language skill development in Arabic language learning.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across four databases: Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Scopus, and the national Indonesian SINTA (Science and Technology Index) portal. The search was restricted to publications from January 2014 through December 2024. Boolean search strings combined the following terms: ('Arabic language' OR 'Arabic education' OR 'Arabic Language Education') AND ('digital' OR 'technology' OR 'e-learning' OR 'online learning' OR 'mobile application' OR 'digital media') AND ('learning' OR 'teaching' OR 'instruction' OR 'education'). Searches were performed independently by both reviewers to ensure completeness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Year	2014–2024	Before 2014 or after December 2024
Language	English or Indonesian	Other languages without English/Indonesian abstract
Topic	Arabic education + digital technology integration	Not relevant to both core topics
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, indexed conference papers	Books, theses, dissertations, opinion pieces, blogs
Context	Arabic language education in Indonesia	Non-Indonesian contexts (unless comparative)
Access	Full text freely accessible	Abstract-only or paywalled without institutional access

Article Selection Process PRISMA Flow

The selection process followed the four-phase PRISMA 2020 flow: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. A total of 187 records were identified across all databases. Following deduplication (n=23 removed), 164 records underwent title and abstract screening, from which 89 articles were deemed potentially eligible for full-text review. Upon full-text assessment, 47 articles were excluded for the following reasons: non-Indonesian context (n=18), full text inaccessible (n=12), and insufficient relevance to both Arabic education and digital technology (n=17). The

remaining 42 articles were included in the final thematic synthesis.

Table 2. PRISMA 2020 Article Selection Summary

Selection Phase	Count (n)	Notes
Records identified across all databases	187	—
Duplicates removed	23	—
Records after deduplication	164	—
Records excluded at title/abstract screening	75	Not relevant to topic
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	89	—
Full-text articles excluded	47	See exclusion reasons
Articles included in final synthesis	42	Final corpus

Data Extraction and Quality Appraisal

Data were extracted using a standardized extraction form capturing: author(s), year, journal name, country, research objectives, methodology, digital technology used, sample characteristics, key findings, and study limitations. Article quality was appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, Hong et al., 2018), which provides a validated framework for evaluating quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies within a single review. No article was excluded solely on quality grounds; quality scores were used to weight the interpretation of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Temporal Publication Trends (RQ1)

Analysis of the 42 included articles revealed a clear and instructive temporal pattern. During the 2014–2019 period, publications were relatively sparse and stable, averaging two to three articles per year, reflecting nascent but growing scholarly interest in digital Arabic education. A dramatic inflection occurred in 2020, when publications surged to eight articles, a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt shift to emergency remote teaching. This peak continued into 2021 (n=9), before gradually stabilizing in 2022 (n=7), 2023 (n=6), and the first half of 2024 (n=4). The pandemic's role as a forced accelerator of digital transformation in Arabic education is unambiguous in this publication trend, underscoring a pivotal moment in the field's technological evolution.

Table 3. Distribution of Publications by Period (2014–2024)

Indicator	2014–2015	2016–2017	2018–2019	2020–2021	2022–2024
Number of Articles	3	4	5	17	13
Percentage (%)	7.1%	9.5%	11.9%	40.5%	31.0%
Average per Year	1.5	2.0	2.5	8.5	4.3

Digital Technologies and Platforms Investigated (RQ2)

The 42 articles examined a wide spectrum of digital technologies, which were coded into four primary categories through inductive content analysis. Mobile applications (Android/iOS) constituted the most frequently studied category (n=16, 38.1%), encompassing Arabic digital dictionaries, Qur'anic recitation applications, and interactive vocabulary learning apps. E-learning platforms and Learning Management Systems (LMS), including Moodle, Google Classroom, and Edmodo, were investigated in 12 articles (28.6%). Video and interactive multimedia, including animated instructional content and tutorial videos, featured in 8 articles (19.0%). Gamification tools and educational games such as Quizlize, Kahoot, and custom-built Arabic puzzle applications were the subject of 6 articles (14.3%). The dominance of mobile applications reflects Indonesian learners' high smartphone penetration rates and the increasing availability of low-cost mobile data, reinforcing a mobile-first approach to digital language learning.

Table 4. Distribution of Digital Technology Categories Investigated

No.	Technology Category	Example Platforms / Applications	Articles (n)	Percentage
1	Mobile Applications (Android/iOS)	Duolingo, Arabic Digital Dictionaries, Quran Apps	16	38.1%
2	E-Learning Platforms & LMS	Moodle, Google Classroom, Edmodo	12	28.6%
3	Video & Interactive Multimedia	YouTube Edu, Animated Lessons, Video Tutorials	8	19.0%
4	Gamification & Educational Games	Quizlize, Kahoot, Custom Arabic Puzzle Apps	6	14.3%
Total			42	100%

Effectiveness of Digital Approaches on Arabic Language Skills (RQ3)

Across the 44 skill-specific studies embedded within the 42 articles, digital technology approaches demonstrated measurable positive effects on all four Arabic

language skills (maharah lughawiyah), though with notable variation in effectiveness across skills. Reading skill (maharah al-qira'ah) yielded the highest effectiveness rate, with 12 of 14 articles (85.7%) reporting statistically significant improvements, primarily attributable to interactive e-books, digital texts with embedded glossaries, and adaptive reading applications. Listening skill (maharah al-istima') followed closely, with 9 of 11 articles (81.8%) documenting significant gains through the use of audio-visual digital media, podcasts, and AI-generated pronunciation models. Speaking skill (maharah al-kalam) showed positive outcomes in 7 of 10 articles (70.0%), facilitated by video conferencing tools, voice-recognition software, and virtual conversation partners. Writing skill (maharah al-kitabah) produced the lowest effectiveness rate, with only 5 of 9 articles (55.6%) reporting significant improvements, suggesting that the unique psychomotor demands of Arabic script, including imla' (dictation) and khat (calligraphy), remain difficult to replicate effectively through currently available digital tools.

Table 5. Effectiveness of Digital Technology per Arabic Language Skill (Maharah Lughawiyah)

Maharah Lughawiyah	Articles (n)	Dominant Technology	Effective (n)	Rate (%)
Al-Qira'ah (Reading)	14	Interactive E-Books, Digital Text Apps	12	85.7%
Al-Istima' (Listening)	11	Audio-Visual Media, AI Pronunciation	9	81.8%
Al-Kalam (Speaking)	10	Video Conference, Voice Recognition AI	7	70.0%
Al-Kitabah (Writing)	9	Online Collaboration Platforms	5	55.6%

Systemic Challenges in Implementation (RQ4)

Thirty-one of the 42 articles (73.8%) explicitly addressed challenges encountered in implementing digital technology for Arabic language education. Four systemic challenges emerged as consistently prominent across the literature. First, educators' digital literacy deficits were identified as the most frequently cited barrier (n=24, 57.1%). Many Arabic language teachers, particularly those employed in pesantren and madrasah in rural and remote areas, lack the technical competencies and pedagogical knowledge required to design, implement, and evaluate digital learning experiences effectively. Second, digital infrastructure inequality, the digital divide between urban and rural regions, was highlighted in 20 articles (47.6%), with unreliable internet connectivity and inadequate access to digital devices identified as major structural impediments. Third, a shortage of high-quality, contextually relevant Arabic digital content designed for Indonesian learners was noted in 17 articles (40.5%). The majority of available Arabic language learning applications have been designed for native English or Arabic speakers and thus lack cultural and linguistic contextualization for Indonesian Muslim learners. Fourth, institutional and cultural resistance to

technological change, particularly within traditional pesantren environments, was documented in 12 articles (28.6%), reflecting tensions between educational tradition and digital innovation.

Table 6. Summary of Systemic Implementation Challenges

No.	Challenge	Primary Context	Articles (n)	Rate (%)
1	Educators' digital literacy deficits	Rural pesantren & madrasah	24	57.1%
2	Digital infrastructure inequality (divide)	Remote & underdeveloped regions (3T)	20	47.6%
3	Shortage of contextual Arabic digital content	Non-Indonesian learning platforms	17	40.5%
4	Resistance to technological change	Traditional Islamic institutions	12	28.6%

DISCUSSION

The overarching picture that emerges from this systematic review is one of considerable promise tempered by persistent structural challenges. The finding that 35 of 42 articles (83.3%) reported positive outcomes from digital technology integration in Arabic language education provides robust empirical support for the pedagogical value of technology-enhanced Arabic language learning. This aligns with the broader TELL literature, which has consistently demonstrated the potential of digital tools to increase learner engagement, expand access to authentic input, and create opportunities for individualized, self-paced practice [13] [20].

The differential effectiveness across the four maharah lughawiyah, with writing skill (al-kitabah) lagging substantially behind the other three, warrants particular scholarly attention. This pattern likely reflects the distinctive psychomotor and neurocognitive demands of Arabic script production, which requires mastery of a right-to-left script with context-sensitive letter forms (imla') and, at advanced levels, calligraphic conventions (khat). These demands have proven difficult to scaffold through existing digital tools, suggesting a productive area for future innovation in Arabic handwriting recognition (AHR) technology and stylus-based tablet applications tailored to Arabic script acquisition.

The COVID-19 pandemic's role as a technological accelerator is both the most striking and most nuanced finding of this review. The dramatic surge in publications between 2020 and 2021 reflects not merely increased researcher interest, but the lived reality of an entire educational ecosystem being abruptly forced to reinvent itself digitally. The innovations born of this crisis period, including the widespread adoption of hybrid and blended learning models, the rapid development of Arabic learning content for video platforms, and the emergency professionalization of online Arabic teaching, are likely to constitute a lasting structural transformation of Arabic language education in Indonesia, even as the pandemic itself recedes.

The four systemic challenges identified in this review, digital literacy deficits, infrastructure inequality, content scarcity, and institutional resistance, collectively constitute what might be termed a 'digital readiness gap' in Indonesian Arabic education. Addressing this gap requires coordinated, multi-stakeholder action involving the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, university teacher training programs, pesantren networks, and digital content developers. Piecemeal, project-based interventions are unlikely to produce the systemic change required; what is needed is a coherent national strategy for digital Arabic education that is equitable, contextually grounded, and pedagogically sound.

CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review demonstrates that the development of digital Arabic language education research in Indonesia during the 2014-2024 period experienced significant growth, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a catalyst for accelerating digital transformation in learning. Based on the analysis of 42 peer-reviewed articles selected through the PRISMA 2020 protocol, mobile applications emerged as the most dominant digital technology due to their alignment with Indonesia's mobile-first digital culture, while digital technology proved most effective in enhancing reading and listening skills but remained less optimal in improving Arabic writing skills. Furthermore, several systemic challenges, including educators' limited digital literacy, infrastructure inequality, the lack of contextualized Arabic learning content, and institutional resistance to change, reveal the existence of a digital readiness gap that requires integrated policy interventions, including strengthening teachers' digital competencies, expanding equitable access to technology, developing locally relevant content, and fostering future innovations in digital Arabic language education research.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed equally to the publication of this paper, and all authors read and approved this paper, and all authors declare no conflict of interest.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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