Arabic Language Curriculum as a Foundation for Strengthening Religious Education in Public Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study was conducted to examine the implementation of the Arabic Language Program (ALP) and to explore how Arabic functions as a foundational medium for the acquisition of Islamic knowledge at a public higher education institution in Malaysia.

Design/methods/approach – This study employed a mixed-method exploratory design in two phases. The first phase involved qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews with 46 informants, classroom observations of two classes and document analysis. These findings were used to construct a quantitative questionnaire, which was then administered in the second phase to 184 respondents. The data were analyzed thematically and statistically with triangulation to ensure depth and validity.

Findings – The study identified three overarching themes: (i) Towards a Dynamic Arabic Language Curriculum for Holistic Islamic Education, (ii) A Curriculum That Meets the Pedagogical Needs of Arabic Language and Religious Learning and (iii) Challenges in the Execution of the ALP Curriculum.

Research implications/limitations – While the findings indicate that ALP has effectively supported students' progress in Islamic studies, the long-established structure of the curriculum may give benefit from greater responsiveness to current educational and industrial needs. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted to explore lecturers' perspectives and post-program outcomes in order to assess its long-term impact and sustainability.

Originality/value – This study provides an in-depth evaluation of a 40-year-old Arabic preparatory program, emphasizing its role in strengthening Islamic education and identifying key areas for reform. It offers a valuable framework for enhancing Arabic language curriculum in higher education, particularly for non-native speakers especially in Southeast Asia, in support of religious educational objectives.

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Introduction

The Arabic Language Program (ALP) is a language learning platform offered by a Public Higher Education Institution in Malaysia that specifically designed for students from Sarawak and Sabah. The program aims to develop foundational Arabic proficiency to support further studies at the pre-university and undergraduate levels. It also seeks to address the shortage of qualified Religious teachers and to enhance the pool of professionals in Islamic education and *da'wah* in East Malaysia. Given the centrality of Arabic in Islamic learning, the ALP serves as a key gateway to broader engagement with Islamic knowledge within the national higher education context.

The previous study shows that the students' understanding on religious knowledge is influenced by various factors (Rekan et al., 2024; Suhaime et al., 2023), one of which is their competence in the Arabic language (Ritonga et al., 2021). The Arabic language is the language of Islam's primary source texts and holds an irreplaceable position in Islamic education. Following the advent of Islam, Arabic emerged as a widely spoken language and developed into a lingua franca across much of the Muslim world (Bashir et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic studies, mastering the Arabic language and its linguistic features is indispensable for scholars and educators, as it ensures that the delivery of Islamic knowledge remains aligned with the authenticity of Islamic teachings (Muslim et al., 2022; Rekan et al., 2025). In order to strengthen religious literacy, especially among students, structured Arabic language education through a strategic and systematic curriculum in educational institutions should be given priority, as it serves as a foundational tool for accessing and understanding the core of Islamic knowledge (Zurqoni et al., 2020).

A systematic and well-structured curriculum serves as the core of educational implementation, encompassing objectives, content, instructional methods and assessment strategies that are carefully designed to achieve the educational goals of a nation, including those of religious education (Hasmori et al., 2011; Sholeh et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic or religious education, such a curriculum is essential to ensure the accurate transmission of values, beliefs and sacred knowledge. In Malaysia, the curriculum and education are two interdependent components that mutually reinforce each other to ensure that the implementation of education remains aligned with the guidelines set forth by the National Education Philosophy (NEP) (Ni'am, 2022). Additionally, the curriculum is also classified as a clear and structured procedure for planning, implementing, developing and managing an educational program (Bakri et al., 2020). In the national context, the curriculum serves as the backbone of educational implementation to ensure alignment with the nation's vision, including the aspiration to nurture students with strong religious identity and moral character, thereby fostering the emergence of a generation that embodies the true identity of a nation-state (Saad et al., 2011).

Hilda Taba in her seminar work *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice*, asserted that curriculum development must encompass clearly defined objectives, content and specific teaching methods to ensure that educational goals are effectively achieved (Taba, 1962). According to Taba, student-centeredness during the teaching and learning process, alongside the articulation of specific and strategic objectives and the inclusion of

continuous assessment elements, serves as a catalyst in the effort to produce high-quality, competent and competitive learners (Saeed et al., 2024). In this regard, Taba emphasizes that educators should be actively involved in the development of an educational curriculum, as they are the individuals who possess the deepest understanding of students' needs within the classroom context (Taba, 1962). This idea is particularly relevant to to the Arabic language curriculum in Malaysia, where the goals of religious education extend beyond language mastery to include the development of spiritual and moral values. By involving Arabic language educators in curriculum design, the educational experience can be tailored to reflect both pedagogical best practices and the spiritual goals outlined in Islamic education. Taba's approach thus offers a practical framework for integrating subject content with religious values, making it particularly suitable for curriculum development in faith-based educational contexts.

Nonetheless, Ralph Tyler's perspective diverges from Taba's, especially on the entities engaged in curriculum development. In his book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, Tyler contends that curriculum development should be overseen by school administrators or designated entities to promote a more coherent and comprehensive educational objective (Tyler, 1950). In the same work, Tyler outlines four fundamental principles that form the foundation of curriculum development: (1) the formulation of clear educational objectives, (2) the selection of learning experiences that support these objectives, (3) the systematic organization of learning activities to facilitate effective instruction and (4) the evaluation of student learning outcomes (Tyler, 1950).

In the Malaysian context, curriculum development within educational institutions is primarily managed by authoritative bodies such as the Ministry of Education. This centralized approach seeks to ensure that curriculum frameworks remain responsive to contemporary educational demands while simultaneously safeguarding the diverse and evolving needs of students (Campbell-Phillips, 2020). To fulfil modern requirements, curriculum development must integrate a degree of flexibility that adapts to the evolving landscape of global education. This highlights the importance of educational courses that are naturally adaptable and dynamic, rather than being constrained by inflexible structures (Hikmah, 2022). This correlates with an essential component of curriculum design, especially its ability to adapt to contemporary demands and significance (Aziz et al., 2020).

The adaptability of a curriculum to ongoing changes has a direct impact on the overall quality of education (Soleman, 2020). At the higher education level, curriculum development is delegated to individual institutions, in accordance with their academic autonomy and internal governance structures (Siti Noor et al., 2021). This shift from a centralized to a decentralized model is also reflected in religious education, including Arabic language instruction. While the school curriculum is standardized to ensure national consistency, higher education institutions are granted the flexibility to design academic programs that respond to specific disciplinary requirements, institutional missions and contemporary societal challenges.

This divergence in structural arrangements brings both advantages and challenges. Centralized control at the school level helps preserve core Islamic values within Arabic

language education. In contrast, the autonomy granted to universities and colleges requires curriculum designers to take responsibility for maintaining and contextualizing these values so that they are aligned with the intellectual, ethical and spiritual needs of contemporary learners. This situation highlights the importance of ensuring coherence and continuity across all educational levels in order to preserve the integrity of Islamic education within an academic and societal environment that is constantly evolving.

In the context of Arabic language instruction and religious education more broadly, the curriculum remains grounded in the National Education Philosophy, which promotes the holistic development of individuals in terms of intellectual ability, moral character and social responsibility (Lubis et al., 2021). At the primary and secondary stages, the Arabic language curriculum is determined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and implemented through the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools, the Standard Curriculum for Secondary Schools and the Integrated *Dini* Curriculum. At the university level, the development and implementation of Arabic language programs are primarily the responsibility of the respective higher education institutions (Sahrir & Muhammad, 2019; Silahuddin et al., 2025). Although different agencies oversee the Arabic curriculum across the various educational stages, its core function in supporting Islamic education remains consistent. The National Education Philosophy continues to serve as a guiding framework throughout all levels of the education system. As emphasized in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015 to 2025 for Higher Education, the Ministry of Higher Education affirms that this philosophy is the foundation for educational progress from school to university (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

Numerous Malaysian higher education institutions provide Arabic language programs at multiple academic levels, including undergraduate, Master and doctoral degree and doctoral degrees. Institutions offering these programs include Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), offering a Bachelor's Degree in Arabic Language with Education; Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS), offering a Diploma in Arabic Language with Education; and both Selangor Islamic University (UIS) and the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), which offer bachelor's programs in Arabic as a Second Language. The Arabic Language Program (ALP) is a well-established language learning program offered by a local public institution. The curriculum, specifically targeted for post-*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) students from religious education backgrounds in Sarawak and Sabah, initiated its first intake in the 1983/1984 academic year. In the 2021/2022 academic year, a total of 1,304 students enrolled in the program. Many of these students have completed their studies and are engaged in various sectors especially in religious affairs in their home states, while many others are still pursuing their academic journeys (Rahman, 2023).

The modification of curriculum to align with educational practice inherently poses various challenges. A significant and widely recognized topic is curriculum equity specifically, the degree to which courses accommodate the varied cognitive abilities of learners in relation to the structured content (Puteh & Meerah, 2011). The standardized curriculum content and elevated learning requirements may disproportionately impact

students with diminished cognitive capacities, potentially increasing their risk of academic underachievement or dropout (Muda et al., 2023). Student disengagement and comprehension issues escalate when the curriculum is excessively complex, compelling teachers to hasten instructional sessions to fulfil the required syllabus (Mutalib, 2022; Kaspin et al., 2024). The misalignment of curriculum with current realities and societal requirements has sparked substantial discussion among scholars, especially in higher education. Irrelevant curriculum not only lacks substantial value-added outcomes for students but may also be subject to discontinuance. In 2022, the University Malaya (UM) discontinued 20 academic programs due to their irrelevance to contemporary industrial needs (Muzamir, 2022).

The Arabic language curriculum's excessive topic density in courses, particularly in the Bachelor of Teaching Arabic as a Second Language (TASL) program at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), has resulted in challenges for student comprehension during learning sessions (Sahrir & Muhammad, 2019). This situation demonstrates a disregard for the suitability and abilities of learners (Nasir et al., 2024). Furthermore, the persistent focus on low-impact subjects further obstructs the optimization of students' proficiency in the Arabic language, leading to learning outcomes that remain unsatisfactory (Sahrir & Muhammad, 2019). Considering these issues and challenges, it is essential to conduct an in-depth study of the curriculum implemented in the Arabic Language Program (ALP), with particular emphasis on its structural design and pedagogical implementation. Although the program has been in existence for over four decades, academic research that specifically addresses its curriculum remains significantly limited.

Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods research paradigm, utilizing an exploratory sequential design to produce contextually grounded insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Rooted in the philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism, this paradigm is particularly appropriate for investigating the Arabic Language Program, as it accommodates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the complexity of educational practices. The initial qualitative phase enables an in-depth exploration of curriculum implementation, pedagogical strategies and contextual challenges. These elements are essential for understanding the multifaceted nature of language instruction within a religious education framework. The subsequent quantitative phase serves to validate and extend these findings across a broader population, thereby enhancing the overall robustness and credibility of the research outcomes.

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling, a strategy employed to identify individuals most capable of providing rich, relevant and meaningful data in alignment with the study's objectives (Merriam, 2009). This sampling approach was deemed appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research, as the selection criteria were instrumental in ensuring the credibility, relevance and depth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). In the first phase of data collection, informants were identified based on their current or prior affiliation with the Arabic Language Program (ALP) at a local public

university. Inclusion criteria encompassed both current ALP students and program alumni, with participation contingent upon informed consent. A total of 46 informants were engaged through individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) and subsequently classified into four categories: (I) ALP alumni currently employed in various sectors (n=11), (ii) ALP alumni pursuing undergraduate studies (n=15), (iii) ALP alumni enrolled in foundation programmes (n=5) and (iv) current ALP students (n=15).

In the second phase, quantitative data were obtained through a survey involving participants who met two specific inclusion criteria: (i) they were enrolled in the ALP between the academic years 2012/2013 and 2023/2024 and (ii) their participation was voluntary. A total of 184 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the minimum required sample size of 162, as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan based on a population of 278 students (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The inclusion of a larger sample size not only enhanced the statistical power of the study but also improved the generalizability and representativeness of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

For the qualitative component, data derived from interviews, observations and document analysis were examined using the thematic analysis framework developed by Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014). This analytical model comprises several key processes, including:

(1) Data condensation
(2) Data display
(3) Drawing and verifying conclusions

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, each informant was allocated a unique identification code while presenting the findings from the interview data. Table 1 below presents a comprehensive overview of the coding method utilized for this purpose:

Table 1. Research Informant Coding Framework

I/	A	B	C	D	oo	.I@FGD	oo
Informant	A: Employed ALP alumni B: ALP alumni at the undergraduate level C: ALP alumni at the foundation level D: Current ALP students				Informant number	I: Individual FGD: Focus Group Discussion	Interview number
Example:							
"Therefore, ALP can firstly foster a deep interest in the Arabic language." I/A01.I01							

For the quantitative component, data obtained from the questionnaire were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.0. Descriptive statistical analyses, including mean scores and standard deviations, were employed to examine the distribution patterns of respondents' responses. This analytical approach enabled the extraction of comprehensive and nuanced insights from the dataset (Bryman, 2016). The interpretation of mean scores was guided by the scale proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein, which served as a reference framework for evaluating the

quantitative responses (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The interpretation scale is presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Score Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 2.00	Low
2.01 - 3.00	Moderately Low
3.01 - 4.00	Moderately High
4.01 - 5.00	High

All data obtained were analyzed through triangulation to strengthen the results and credibility of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Result and Discussion

This study was conducted to examine the implementation of the Arabic Language Program (ALP) and to explore how Arabic functions as a foundational medium for the acquisition of Islamic knowledge at a public higher education institution in Malaysia. Based on the analyzed data, several distinct themes were identified and developed as below:
  (1) Towards a Dynamic Arabic Language Curriculum for Holistic Islamic Education
  (2) A Curriculum That Meets the Pedagogical Needs of Arabic Language and Religious Learning
  (3) Challenges in the Execution of the ALP Curriculum

1.   Towards a Dynamic Arabic Language Curriculum for Holistic Islamic Education

According to the findings, some of the curriculum offered in ALP studies is in Arabic. This matter is as expressed by the informant specifically:

"When I first saw the subjects, I was honestly surprised. Out of all the ALP subjects, there were 10 in Arabic and only one in English." I/A04.I02

Based on these findings, three sub-themes were identified to enhance comprehension of the curriculum components of the ALP program:
  (1) Language-Centric Courses
  (2) Non-linguistic Courses
  (3) Lecture Structure and Teaching Hours

1.1 Language-Centric Courses

The courses offered in the ALP curriculum significantly contributed to students' learning and mastery of the Arabic language. Based on the interview data and document analysis, seven language-focused courses were identified within the program's curriculum, specifically:

Table 3. Language Courses in the ALP Curriculum
(Source: ALP Timetable and Textbook List, Academic Session 2023/2024)

No	Course Title	Interview Excerpt	Informant
1.	*Nahw* and *Sarf*	*"We can truly master the Arabic language when we study Nahw and Sarf more thoroughly."*	I/A08.I03
2.	*Al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*	*"Furthermore, in ALP, we have the subject of Istima' wal Kalam, correct?"*	I/B21.FGD04
3.	*Al-Khitobah*	*"I wish to address the subject of Khitobah."*	I/D32.FGD07
4.	*Al-Mutalaah*	*"We work with a variety of literature in Mutala'ah."*	I/D43.FGD09
5.	*Al-Imla' wa al-Insya'*	*"One of the subjects provided in ALP is al-Imla, right?"*	I/A02.FGD01
6.	*Al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyah*	*"Another subject that is particularly beneficial in al-Tharwah."*	I/A06.FGD02
7.	English Language	*"And there's one English subject. Madam X was the lecturer then."*	I/A09.I09

Table 3 shows that six of the language courses specifically focus on Arabic language learning, while one course focuses on English language instruction. The implementation of these Arabic courses aligns with ALP's fundamental goal as a foundational platform for Arabic language learning (Rahman, 2023). On the other hand, offering an English course is regarded as a valuable and essential enhancement, especially in the context of equipping students for advanced degrees. One of the study's informants reinforced this viewpoint with the following statement:

> *"We'll continue learning English during the Foundation program. Plus, we'll have to sit for the MUET (Malaysian University English Test). So, the English subject in ALP gave us an early overview before taking that test later."* I/D35.FGD07

Moreover, the inclusion of Arabic and English language courses aligns with the requirements set by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), which stipulates that the overall structure of any educational program must correspond with the objectives and intended learning outcomes defined by each higher education institution (Jabatan Pengajian Tinggi & Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2010; Hussin et al., 2020).

The research also indicated a strong alignment between the ALP curriculum and the Arabic language curriculum of other higher education institutions. This alignment is illustrated in the following table, which offers a comparative analysis of selected courses across these institutions:

Table 4: Language Course Offerings in Arabic Language Programs at Selected Malaysian Higher Education Institution
(Source: Official websites of the respective institutions)

No.	Institution of Higher Learning	Academic Programme	Courses Offered
1.	Selangor Islamic University (UIS)	Foundation in Arabic Language (Universiti Islam Selangor, 2025)	• *At-Tatbiqat Fi al-Istima'* • *At-Tatbiqat Fi al-Kalam* • *At-Tatbiqat Fi al-Kitabah* • *Al-Lughah al-Arabiah Al-Ittisoliah* • *Al-Muqaddimah Fi Ilm al-Balaghah* • *An-Nahw al-Asasi* • *As-Sarf al-Asasi*

No.	Institution	Programme	Courses
			• *Al-Lughah al-Arabiah At-Tatbiqiah* • *At-Tatbiqat Fi al-Qiraah* • Foundation English
2.	Centre for Foundation Studies (IIUM)	Foundation in Arabic Language (Centre for Foundation Studies, 2025a)	• Quranic Language • English Language • *Al-Nahw wa al-Sarf* • *Maharat al-Taqdim* • *Madkhal Ila Ma'arif al-Wahy wa al-Turath al-Islami* • *Maharat Kitabah* • *Maharat Qira'ah* • *Al-Adab al-'Arabi*
		Foundation in Arabic for International Communication (Centre for Foundation Studies, 2025b)	• Quranic Language • English Level 4 @ 5 • *Al-Nahw wa al-Sarf* • *Maharat al-Taqdim* • *Madkhal Ila Maʿarif al-Waḥy Wa al-Turath al-Islami* • *Al-Qira'ah al-Muwassa'ah* • *Al-Kitabah al-Wazifiyyah* • *Maharat al-Tawasul bi al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah*
3.	Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU)	Foundation in Arabic and Islamic Studies (Centre of Preparatory Studies & Languages, 2025)	• Dictation Arabic • Arabic Composition • Arabic Reading Comprehension • Simplified Syntax of Arabic • Arabic Literary Texts • English for General Purpose • Arabic Reading • Using the Computer • Biography of the Prophet • Quranic Exegesis • Tradition of Prophet

Table 4 demonstrates that all institutions prioritize the development of core Arabic language competencies, particularly in grammar, reading, writing and oral communication. The consistent inclusion of courses such as *Nahw* and *Sarf*, reading comprehension and writing skills reflects a common pedagogical emphasis on linguistic proficiency across the board. However, significant differences are evident in terms of program structure and progression pathways.

While institutions such as UIS, IIUM and MEDIU allow students to proceed directly from their foundation programmes to undergraduate studies within the same institution, the Arabic Language Program (ALP) adopts a more segmented academic structure. Students enrolled in the ALP undergo a two-semester preparatory programme focused on Arabic language acquisition. This is followed by a separate Foundation in Islamic Studies at the same branch campus before advancing to undergraduate programmes at the main campus. This progression model introduces an additional academic layer not present in the other institutions surveyed.

The ALP thus serves as an initial platform for introducing students to the Arabic language, providing essential linguistic skills prior to their engagement in a more intensive Islamic studies curriculum. This deliberate sequencing reflects a scaffolded approach that distinguishes ALP from other models. One participant in the study highlighted this matter by stating:

> "I would say that before students start their studies in the Foundation in Islamic Studies, where Arabic becomes the medium of teaching and all learning materials are in Arabic, ALP functions as a preparation program for them. Therefore, since we already know Arabic from ALP, it becomes rather simpler at the fundamental level, as we already have the foundations." I/A10.I05

This finding highlights that the structured ALP curriculum places strong emphasis on Arabic language mastery and prioritizes students' linguistic proficiency, equipping them with a foundational knowledge base that supports their progression into more advanced Islamic studies (Zurqoni et al., 2020; Kaspin et al., 2024), particularly upon completion of the program. In addition, the ALP was designed to facilitate students' initial adaptation to the academic environment of university life. This objective was underscored by one of the informants, who remarked:

> "There were seniors among us who had already finished ALP and were on their way to Foundation school. They helped us get used to university life by sharing experiences and insights from their time in the Foundation program." I/C30.FGD06

This finding further suggests that while the ALP primarily focuses on Arabic language instruction, it also aims to offer students a foundational experience that prepares them for transition into higher levels of study. Through early exposure to academic settings, peer mentorship and familiarity with institutional expectations, students are indirectly equipped to navigate the challenges of both foundation and undergraduate education.

1.2 Non-linguistic Courses

The ALP program expands students' academic exposure beyond their fundamental linguistic competencies by including non-language courses in addition to language-based learning. The list of non-language courses offered within the ALP curriculum is presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Non-Language Courses in the ALP Curriculum
(Source: ALP Timetable and Textbook List, Academic Session 2023/2024)

No	Course Title	Interview Excerpt	Informant
1.	*Al-Aswat wa Al-Tajwid*	*"In addition, I studied Quran-related subjects such as al-Aswat wa al-Tajwid, which focused on the rules of tajwid, articulation points (makhraj) and related phonetic principles"*	I/D32.FGD07
2.	Ethics Studies	*"Our first class at the beginning was ES (Ethics Studies)."*	I/D40.FGD08
3.	Moral Education	*"There's one subject taught by Dr. X, Moral Education."*	I/B17.FGD04

Table 5 illustrates that the ALP also includes religious studies courses in addition to Arabic language instruction. In support of this insertion, one of the study's informants said:

> "ALP not only imparts knowledge of the Arabic language to us. Additionally, ALP exposes us to Quranic studies." I/C30.FGD06

The program's dedication to providing a comprehensive educational experience is evidenced by the incorporation of religious components, including Qur'anic recitation, moral education and ethics studies. Notably, this curriculum structure is consistent with the Foundation in Arabic Language programs offered at UIS, IIUM and MEDIU, all of which incorporate religious and linguistic knowledge. This similarity strengthens ALP's role as a complete preparatory program that helps improve language skills and religious understanding, making it comparable to similar language programs at other institutions.

Alongside Qur'anic knowledge, the ALP curriculum prioritizes the development of character and ethics through courses Ethics Studies and Moral Education. This focus aligns with the national education agenda, which encourages adding ethical and moral values to teaching and learning to help create a skilled and competitive future generation while still upholding basic ethical and Islamic principles (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The strategic and proactive approach to incorporating these elements into the ALP curriculum is a response to growing concerns regarding ethical and moral issues among students in higher education institutions (Hassan et al., 2020). As a result, adding ethical and moral elements to the ALP curriculum is a planned effort to develop a well-rounded generation who are skilled in the Arabic language and religious knowledge and who also practice ethical and moral values in their daily lives.

1.3 Lecture structure and Teaching Hours

The findings indicate that most courses in the ALP program are offered across both semesters of the academic year. This structure supports progressive skill development and ensures consistent exposure to core content. The distribution of courses by semester is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Course Offerings by Semester in the ALP Program
(Source: ALP Teaching Timetable, Academic Session 2023/2024)

No	Course Title	Academic Semester	
		Semester I	Semester II
Language Courses			
1.	*Nahu*	/	/
2.	*Sarf*	/	/
3.	*Al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*	/	/
4.	*Al-Khitobah*	/	/
5.	*Al-Mutalaah*	/	/
6.	*Al-Imla' wa al-Insya'*	/	/

7.	*Al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyah*	/	/
8.	English Language	/	/
Non-Language Courses			
9.	*Al-Aswat wa al-Tajwid*	/	/
10.	Ethics Studies	/	
11.	Moral Education		/

Language courses are consistently delivered across both semesters, reflecting the program's commitment to continuous language development. To further analyze curriculum implementation, information on the frequency and total teaching hours of each course was extracted from the same timetable document. This is detailed in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of Lectures and Weekly Teaching Hours per Course in the ALP Program
(Source: ALP Teaching Timetable, Academic Session 2023/2024)

SEMESTER I (17 WEEKS)			
No	**Course Title**	**Lectures per Week**	**Total Teaching Hours per Week**
1.	*Nahw*	2 lectures	4 hours
2.	*Sarf*	2 lectures	4 hours
3.	*Al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*	2 lectures	4 hours
4.	*Al-Mutalaah*	2 lectures	4 hours
5.	*Al-Aswat wa al-Tajwid*	2 lectures	3 hours
6.	English Language	2 lectures	3 hours
7.	*Al-Khitobah*	1 lecture	2 hours
8.	*Al-Imla' wa al-Insya'*	1 lecture	2 hours
9.	*Al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyah*	1 lecture	2 hours
10.	Ethics Studies	1 lecture	2 hours
	Total	**16 lectures**	**30 hours**
SEMESTER II (17 WEEKS)			
No	**Course Title**	**Lectures per Week**	**Total Teaching Hours per Week**
1.	*Nahw*	2 lectures	4 hours
2.	*Sarf*	2 lectures	4 hours
3.	*Al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*	2 lectures	4 hours
4.	*Al-Mutalaah*	2 lectures	4 hours
5.	*Al-Aswat wa al-Tajwid*	1 lecture	3 hours
6.	English Language	1 lecture	3 hours
7.	*Al-Khitobah*	1 lecture	2 hours

8.	*Al-Imla' wa al-Insya'*	1 lecture	2 hours
9.	*Al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyah*	1 lecture	2 hours
10.	Moral Education	1 lecture	2 hours
	Total	**14 lectures**	**30 hours**

This structure demonstrates a balanced teaching workload of 30 hours per week in both semesters, with sustained emphasis on core language courses. The consistent delivery of these subjects enables continuous reinforcement of key language skills, while the inclusion of non-language courses such as Ethics Studies and Moral Education provides holistic support for students' moral and character development.

The study also reveals that the ALP curriculum has preserved a consistent structure over time. Alumni from the 2005/2006 cohort and current students from the 2023/2024 academic session reported taking the same core courses, indicating a long-standing continuity in curriculum offerings. Informants shared the following statements to illustrate this trend:

"We have the Khitobah subject, taught by Dr. X. In this course, we must speak in front of others." I/A01.I01

A current student from the 2023/2024 cohort echoed a similar experience:

"Among all the ALP subjects, Khitobah is my favourite. I feel it's a more relaxed and enjoyable class." I/D38.FGD08

These findings suggest that the ALP curriculum remains relevant in contemporary educational contexts while demonstrating a degree of structural consistency. However, this observation contrasts with existing research that advocates for curricula to be dynamic, responsive and adaptable to the changing demands of 21st-century education (Hikmah, 2022). As highlighted by Tyler (1950), curriculum that remain static over long periods risk becoming misaligned with evolving pedagogical standards and learner expectations.

This concern is particularly salient within the field of religious education, where curriculum developers must carefully balance the preservation of enduring Islamic values with the incorporation of modern educational methodologies to ensure meaningful learning experiences. In the absence of systematic evaluation and formal accreditation, such programs may fail to meet the needs of present-day students or respond to the shifting demands of the professional landscape. Without ongoing review mechanisms, religious-oriented initiatives such as the Arabic Language Program (ALP) may struggle to prepare students adequately, not only for advanced Islamic studies, but also for real-world contexts where Arabic language proficiency is essential. Accordingly, periodic and structured curriculum evaluation is vital to uphold both the academic integrity and practical relevance of these programs (Hussin et al., 2020).

The findings indicate that the ALP curriculum is progressing in a positive direction. It demonstrates a strong alignment with the linguistic needs and proficiency levels of its

learners. This conclusion is further supported by the quantitative data obtained from respondents, as presented in Table 8:

Table 8: Respondent's Perspectives on the ALP Curriculum

No	Item	Mean	Interpretation	SD
1.	The ALP curriculum is appropriate for my academic level.	4.79	High	0.45
2.	The general framework of the ALP is satisfactory.	4.76	High	0.54
3.	The course content in ALP is beneficial for my Arabic language learning.	4.82	High	0.45
	Average	**4.79**	**High**	**0.48**

These results reflect a high level of satisfaction among respondents regarding the curriculum's structure and its role in facilitating Arabic language acquisition. Nevertheless, to sustain this positive trajectory, the curriculum must remain adaptable and forward-looking. Institutions implementing the ALP should proactively engage in continuous evaluation and refinement processes to ensure the curriculum remains responsive to current educational imperatives and future challenges (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2013).

2. A Curriculum That Meets the Pedagogical Needs of Arabic Language and Religious

2.1 Learning Arabic Grammar as a Fundamental Framework Within the ALP Curriculum

The integration of Arabic grammar into the ALP curriculum enhances students' linguistic skills and serves as a critical gateway to understanding the primary sources of Islamic knowledge, such as the Qur'an, Hadith and classical scholarly texts. By embedding *Nahw* and *Sarf* within the curriculum as foundational elements, the program ensures that students are equipped not only for general language use, but also for precise comprehension of religious discourse. In the language acquisition grammar serves as a vital component that establishes the structural foundation necessary for fluency, expression and comprehension. Two branches of Arabic grammar, *Nahw* (syntax) and *Sarf* (morphology), warrant special emphasis in language instruction. Both are presented as distinct courses within the ALP curriculum, underscoring their critical importance in students' development of language competence. Their significance was highlighted by one of the informants in the study, who made the following discovery:

"We have separate Nahw and Sarf subjects. Back in school, both were taught together." I/D41.FGD08

By separating these two branches of Arabic grammar, the teaching and learning process has become more focused and structured, thus reducing the overlap and confusion between them. One source articulated this clearly when it stated:

"Teaching the two courses separately allows me to learn the language deeper. It helps make the learning less muddled and more focused." I/D41.FGD08

Apart from creating a more structured educational setting, *Nahw* and *Sarf* serve as the foundation for the practical application of linguistic skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing (Suhaimi & Sabri, 2023; Zulkiple et al., 2023; Rani & Bakar, 2021). One of the participants highlighted the cohesive function of Arabic grammar, stating:

> "The Nahw and Sarf subjects are very helpful, especially in mastering the four core language skills." I/D42.FGD09

These results clearly demonstrate the significance of the *Nahw* and *Sarf* courses within the ALP curriculum in equipping students with the essential knowledge needed to achieve comprehensive Arabic fluency. Despite this importance, gaps in grammatical mastery continue to pose challenges for students, particularly in their ability to successfully apply the language across all four language skills. Similarly, prior research has emphasized this issue for instance, students at the *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (STPM) level have been found to possess inadequate reading proficiency due to their insufficient understanding of Arabic grammar (Noor et al., 2025).

Furthermore, students face challenges in acquiring writing skills, particularly when their grasp of Arabic grammar is limited. Their inability to apply appropriate syntactic and morphological rules often restricts their capacity to produce cohesive and grammatically correct phrases in writing (Awang et al., 2025). Consequently, the curriculum content should be strengthened to enhance the teaching of Arabic grammar within the ALP program, specifically through dedicated *Nahw* and *Sarf* courses. Improving these elements will serve the larger goal of establishing Arabic as a second language among learners and lead to more efficient language acquisition.

2.2 Curriculum ALP as a Medium for Strengthening Language Proficiency Language skills

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the language skills that are strongly emphasized in the ALP curriculum. These elements are deliberately incorporated into the course structure to ensure that students develop well-rounded language skills. One of the informants confirmed that:

> "In my opinion, ALP is a program that provides its students with the fundamental Arabic language skills they need." I/A10.I05

The emphasis on acquiring all four language skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing in the context of Arabic language learning, aligns with the recommendations of various Arabic language scholars. The ALP curriculum progressively integrates these skills, which are crucial for successful second language acquisition (Razali, 2020). The following table categorizes these skills and lists the relevant courses offered in the program:

Table 9: Emphasis on Language Skills in the ALP Curriculum

Language Skills	Interview Excerpt	Informant
Listening	*"We have the al-Istima' wa al-Kalam subject, which helps us in listening and speaking in Arabic."*	I/A07.FGD02
Speaking	*"The Khitobah subject is like delivering a sermon—in Arabic. It helps us develop formal speaking skills."*	I/A04.I02

Reading	*"In al-Mutala'ah, we encounter Arabic texts. The lecturers ask us to read directly from the materials."*	I/A08.I03
Writing	*"The al-Imla' wa al-Insya' subject in ALP has really helped me with Arabic writing."*	I/C27.FGD06

The classification shows that the ALP curriculum clearly covers each basic language competency through specific course offerings, as this classification demonstrates. Informants' responses confirm that the curriculum provides structured opportunities for students to engage with all four skills, which reinforces the program's holistic approach to Arabic language acquisition.

According to the findings from the questionnaire presented in Table 10, all items related to the four fundamental language skills exhibited high mean values. This finding reinforces the conclusion that the ALP curriculum emphasizes not only theoretical training but also the practical application of language skills. The integration of language use into classroom activities serves as a catalyst for enhancing students' Arabic proficiency (Rahman & Baharudin, 2023; Rekan et al., 2025). This situation was also reflected in the experience of an informant, who stated:

"The ustaz encouraged us to participate in classroom activities. So, indirectly, it helped us to use Arabic language more actively." I/A10.I05

The ALP curriculum is structured to support the 21st Century Learning (21st CL), which actively encourages the practical application of language. Specifically, it embodies the essential elements of 21st CL, which are critical thinking, creativity, communication, teamwork and values. By encouraging comprehensive and student-centered learning experiences, the curriculum's combination of theoretical knowledge with real-world application improves the efficacy of Arabic language learning (Said et al., 2020). According to the survey results, most participants agreed that the ALP curriculum greatly aids in their Arabic language development. These findings further reinforce previous studies which highlight that the curriculum designed for learning purposes significantly influences students' learning experiences (Jamiu, 2022). In the context of Arabic language learning, a strategically structured curriculum can enhance students' language proficiency outcomes (Alfayez, 2022). This particular scenario also in line with the recommendations of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), which emphasises that a well-governed curriculum should have clearly defined goals, especially in producing graduates who meet the intended learning objectives (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2013). Notably, the item *"The ALP curriculum's content effectively supports my Arabic language development"* received a mean score of 4.82, which is considered high. This result illustrates the curriculum's usefulness in promoting language learning. The following table provides additional information on curriculum-related items and how they affect students' Arabic proficiency:

Table 10: Respondents' Perspective on the Relationship between the ALP Curriculum and Arabic Language Proficiency

No	Item	Mean	Interpretation	SD

1.	The ALP curriculum's content effectively supports my Arabic language development.	4.82	High	0.45
2.	The ALP curriculum significantly enhances my Arabic language skills.	4.74	High	0.52
3.	The ALP curriculum enhances my listening skills.	4.78	High	0.48
4.	The ALP curriculum enhances my speaking skills.	4.67	High	0.55
5.	The ALP curriculum enhances my reading skills.	4.83	High	0.40
6.	The ALP curriculum enhances my writing skills.	4.77	High	0.46
7.	The ALP curriculum enhances my confidence in using Arabic in everyday life.	4.68	High	0.55
	Average	**4.76**	**High**	**0.56**

These findings were supported by classroom observations during a *Nahw* (syntax) instruction session. The lecturer employed a group presentation technique for a pre-selected topic. According to the observations, ALP students primarily used Arabic for their presentations, occasionally incorporating Malay as a supplementary medium. Presenters and other students actively engaged in two-way communication, while non-presenting students took notes attentively. This situation highlights the prioritization of Arabic language use in grammar-focused classes. This finding also aligns with previous research advocating for the integration of language use into grammar instruction, which reflects the combination of grammatical knowledge with communicative practice. By connecting academic knowledge to real-world application, this integration enhances language development (Rusdi et al., 2023).

2.3 Vocabulary Enrichment as a Bridge to Classical Islamic Knowledge

The enhancement of vocabulary is a crucial element in the learning of any foreign language. A strong vocabulary foundation improves students' language skills. The study's findings reveal that *al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyyah* is a course that is intended to enhance vocabulary development within the ALP curriculum. One of the study's informants acknowledged the course's purpose, as follow:

> "The al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyyah subject gives us a lot of new words and some that we've never even heard before." I/D35.FGD07

Additionally, a few informants noted that language acquisition occurs through courses apart from *al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyyah*. One informant highlighted the importance of *al-Mutala'ah* in enhancing vocabulary acquisition through direct engagement with literature, as follow:

> "In the al-Mutala'ah subject, the lecturer would ask us to identify new words. We would point them out, and the ustaz would explain their meanings." I/C27.FGD06

Another informant added:

> "We also learn a lot of new words through the al-Istima' wa al-Kalam subject." I/D33.FGD07

A broad vocabulary basis significantly facilitates the mastery of the four core language skills in the study of the Arabic language (Ngalawi & Zainal, 2020). One of the informants distinctly acknowledged this relationship by saying:

> "For example, when we're asked to write essays in al-Imla' wa al-Insya', we need a wide range of vocabulary to support us. In ALP, there are many subjects that help us expand our vocabulary." I/A08.I03

The results of this study further support earlier findings that highlight the close relationship between vocabulary breadth and general language proficiency among Arabic language learners (Aluwi & Ghani, 2023). Nevertheless, it is remarkable and somewhat ironic that previous research continues to indicate that students enrolled in Arabic language programs at the tertiary level possess inadequate vocabulary proficiency (Samah et al., 2023). Data from previous studies showed that students generally had a vocabulary of about 1885 Arabic words, but they only actively used 1655 of those terms. This finding does not meet the minimum suggested threshold of 2000 words needed for efficient functional language use (Abdullah & Bakar, 2022; Qamariah & Hercz, 2025). In the context of religious education, limited vocabulary proficiency can hinder students' ability to comprehend and interpret Islamic texts, which are deeply rooted in classical Arabic. Therefore, it is essential that the authorized bodies responsible for the development of the ALP curriculum prioritize the growth of vocabulary among students. Strengthening this component is crucial to ensuring that learners are equipped not only for general language communication but also for engaging meaningfully with religious sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship (Abdalla, 2025). This component must be fortified to guarantee that the implementation of ALP adheres to the criteria of a comprehensive and effective language education program.

The findings of this study show that the ALP curriculum is well-positioned to prepare students with a comprehensive and powerful grasp of the Arabic language. As evidenced by the questionnaire data in Table 10, the item *"The ALP curriculum enhances my confidence to use Arabic in daily life"* achieved a high mean score of 4.68. These findings indicate that respondents strongly agreed that the curriculum structured in ALP promotes the practical application of Arabic outside of the classroom in addition to supporting formal language development.

Additional evidence of language application was observed during a teaching and learning session for the subject *al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*. The lecturer invited two native Arabic speakers from the Middle East to discuss current world issues in this session. Throughout the session, ALP students were noted to be paying careful attention and taking notes in their notebooks. Several students actively participated by asking questions in Arabic during the subsequent question-and-answer period. This scenario demonstrates that ALP students are capable to integrate the Arabic language into their daily lives, not only within the framework of the curriculum and classroom instruction but also in genuine two-way interactions with the outer world, beyond the syllabus.

3.   Challenges in the Execution of the ALP Curriculum

The implementation of the ALP curriculum inevitably encounters several issues and challenges, like any other educational program, particularly in the realm of language learning. The list includes issues related to teaching staff, the availability and quality of teaching materials, learning settings, educational policy frameworks and the statutory status of the Arabic language within the Malaysian Education Act of 1996. These issues are often examined in academic and institutional contexts, as they significantly influence the efficacy and sustainability of Arabic language teaching within the national curriculum (Zaini et al., 2019). The implementation of the Arabic language curriculum is further complicated by the inaccessibility of Arabic language resources and the laissez-faire attitude of parents who outsource all responsibility to educators (Ismail et al., 2024).

According to the findings, the implementation of the ALP curriculum presents several significant challenges. The first relates to the curriculum content. The data indicate that there is no clear system in place for updating course materials across the various disciplines offered under the ALP. This concern was also expressed by one of the study's interviewees, a student enrolled in the ALP during the 2023–2024 academic session:

> "There's this one subject, al-Istima' wa al-Kalam. The content in that book is like the old ones. The pictures are also like those from the 90s era." I/D44.FGD09

Furthermore, the curriculum's content was thought to be unrelated to vocabulary's real-world applications. The following is what one of the sources said about this worry:

> "In al-Tharwah al-Lughawiyyah, the instructor separated the course material into several main subjects. However, I observed that our everyday language does not typically use some of the words the lecturers taught. So, in terms of real-world application, I find it lacking." I/D42.FGD09

This finding reveals an inconsistency between the curriculum and the communication demands of the students, indicating that some curriculum components might be revised to guarantee more contextual and functional relevance. During the focus group discussion, another participant reaffirmed this perspective by adding:

> "I agree. I would like to add one more thing. While I don't necessarily think that the vocabulary is completely pointless, I do think that some of the words we acquire aren't practical. I think it could have a greater impact if the words were more relevant to everyday life." I/D43.FGD09

Considering these findings, it is essential that those authorities responsible for the ALP curriculum's structure conduct ground-level evaluations and reassess the program's content to ensure that it is in accordance with current issues and emerging standards. Neglecting to address these issues may lead to students being insufficiently equipped to confront a progressively challenging and competitive future. Strangely, these results contradict the suggestion that the necessity for institutional curriculum to be in line with the demands of the market today (Amran, 2023). Consequently, these findings may provide the curriculum developers with a foundation for critical reflection and evaluation, thereby requiring a re-evaluation of the program's content to determine its compatibility with current industry requirements.

Conclusion

This study presents an in-depth analysis of the Arabic Language Program (ALP) curriculum more than four decades after its establishment. The findings demonstrate that the ALP provides a coherent and structured Arabic language education that is closely integrated with Islamic studies. Rather than serving solely as a preparatory language course, the ALP functions as a foundational platform that facilitates deeper engagement with Islamic knowledge through direct access to primary Arabic sources. This design enhances students' linguistic proficiency while supporting their intellectual and spiritual development. The findings imply that Arabic language curricula embedded within Islamic education frameworks should be purposefully structured to achieve both linguistic competence and religious literacy, thereby fulfilling the dual objectives of language mastery and faith-based scholarship.

In addition, the study identifies several critical challenges that require institutional and policy-level attention. These include the need to update course content in alignment with contemporary educational standards and to address the shortage of qualified educators essential for effective curriculum delivery. These issues have important implications for educational administrators and policymakers who are responsible for ensuring the continued relevance, sustainability and quality of the ALP. The findings suggest that ongoing curriculum evaluation and investment in human resource development are essential to strengthen the program's long-term impact. Furthermore, future research should include quantitative assessments of student achievement after completing the ALP, as well as qualitative investigations from the perspectives of instructors, in order to generate a more holistic understanding of the curriculum. The insights from this study offer a valuable reference for the development of Arabic language programs in higher education, particularly in non-Arabic-speaking Muslim societies such as those in Southeast Asia, where Arabic plays a central role in Islamic education.

Acknowledgment

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