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## Learning Outcomes of Arabic Pedagogy Via Classical Islamic Texts: A Systematic Review of the Indonesian *Pesantren* Tradition

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**Abstract.** This study systematically reviews instructional strategies employed for teaching Arabic through traditional Islamic books (known as *Kitab Kuning*) at Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The central issue of this study was to identify whether traditional, modern or hybrid pedagogical approaches are most effective in enhancing Arabic language proficiency, textual comprehension, and learner engagement. By applying PRISMA 2020 and the Campbell Collaboration guidelines, the review adopted a qualitative thematic synthesis rather than a statistical meta-analysis to synthesize evidence from 86 empirical studies published between 2016 and 2025 and retrieved from open-access academic databases. The analysis to evaluate instructional practices is grounded in sociocultural theory, constructivist learning theory and cognitive load theory. Findings reveal four major instructional models: traditional oral transmission (*sorogan/bandong*), grammar-based methods (*nahwu-sharf*), structured innovations (e.g., *Tamyiz*), and hybrid digital-assisted approaches. Structured and hybrid models had significantly better learner outcomes for reading fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary retention, and engagement. Conversely, traditional methods, while preserving textual sanctity, often restricted autonomy and interactive learning. Challenges included high cognitive load, inadequate teacher preparation, and infrastructural deficiencies. The review underscores the adaptive capacity of *pesantren* pedagogy by demonstrating latent alignment with modern education theories. It

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provides clear and practical ideas for policymakers, curriculum designers, and teachers on how to maintain classical authenticity while teaching Arabic effectively in religious education today.

**Keywords:** Arabic Instruction; *Kitab Kuning*, *pesantren*; systematic review; traditional Islamic books

## 1. Introduction

Arabic occupies a central position in Islamic education: It functions as a means of communication and serves as the primary gateway to acquiring foundational Islamic knowledge (Nawas et al., 2025). Mastery of Arabic gives access to core sources such as the Qur'ān, ḥadīth, classical jurisprudence, theology, and the rich tradition of Arabic literature (Abduh et al., 2023; Akmaliah et al., 2021; Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). Because central Islamic texts are inseparable from their linguistic form, meaningful engagement with the Islamic intellectual tradition requires more than basic reading ability; it demands deep linguistic competence in grammar, semantics, morphology, and rhetoric.

Thus, proficiency in Arabic is a prerequisite for contributing to evolving scholarly debates and participating in global Islamic discourse that shapes contemporary Muslim identity and thought (Ritonga et al., 2023; Ro'uf, 2018). In such contexts, the education challenge lies in preserving the sacred and scholarly role of Arabic while simultaneously adopting pedagogical approaches grounded in modern second-language acquisition (SLA) theory, including learner-centered instruction, communicative practice, and cognitive scaffolding (Albab, 2019; Daud et al., 2020). These contemporary insights emphasize that meaningful language learning must involve interaction, negotiation of meaning, sociocultural engagement, and authentic language use—elements often missing from traditional instructional environments.

Indonesia represents one of the largest ecosystems in which Arabic education is deeply institutionalized. With 39 551 *pesantren* operating nationwide (Maarif, 2024), Arabic holds symbolic, functional, and cultural value in the education system. These *pesantren* preserve Islamic scholarship and cultivate religious identity by engaging students in canonical Arabic texts daily, thereby positioning Arabic not as a foreign language but as a scholarly, devotional, and intellectual medium (Kaptein, 2020; Wais Al Qorni, 2021). Learning Arabic in *pesantren* is, therefore, inseparable from students' moral formation and religious socialization, because Islamic rituals, daily routines, classroom discourse, and community life contribute to shaping linguistic habits and spiritual dispositions (Arar et al., 2023; Wahyudi et al., 2023).

In this context, Arabic becomes both a spiritual practice and an academic pursuit, by forming a holistic learning experience that integrates cognition, faith, and discipline. A defining feature of *pesantren* Arabic education is the use of the *Kitab Kuning*, traditional Islamic texts, which are often printed on yellowed paper and are largely vowelless. These works cover diverse fields, such as Qur'ānic exegesis, fiqh, rhetoric, theology, logic, and Arabic grammar (Arif et al., 2023; Reese, 2022).

Reading *Kitab Kuning* requires the ability to interpret meaning without diacritics, reconstruct ellipses, and apply syntactic rules with precision. Learners must, therefore, internalize grammatical structures, become highly metalinguistic, and develop analytical reading strategies to successfully decode meaning (Aldawsari et al., 2023).

However, modern SLA research challenges this traditional paradigm. Contemporary approaches suggest that communicative competence, interactive learning, and learner autonomy are essential dimensions of language mastery (Aziz et al., 2021). In many *pesantren*, teacher-centered explanations, passive listening, and reductive translation exercises limit opportunities for spoken interaction, peer collaboration or task-based learning (Daflaini et al., 2023). Consequently, many students achieve high proficiency in reading and textual interpretation but remain weak in oral production, listening comprehension, and communicative competence, which creates a pedagogical divide between classical literacy goals and holistic language proficiency (Akmaliyah et al., 2021). This mismatch reflects a broader educational dilemma: whether Arabic in *pesantren* should serve as a tool only for religious scholarship or evolve into a fully functional second language that includes modern communication skills.

To analyze this complexity, three theoretical frameworks offer valuable perspectives. First, sociocultural learning theory argues that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and mediated guidance within a learner's zone of proximal development (Newman & Latifi, 2021). In *sorogan*, the close *ustādh*-*santri* interaction exemplifies scaffolded learning, during which personalized correction and guided interpretation gradually build expertise (Akmaliyah et al., 2021). Second, constructivist theory asserts that meaningful knowledge arises from active engagement, which suggests that integrating dialogic reading, problem-solving, and collaborative interpretation of *Kitab Kuning* could foster higher-order reasoning and metacognitive development (Rofi'i, 2024).

Third, cognitive load theory provides insight into the processing burden imposed by vowelless script, dense syntax, and implicit grammatical structures. By combining these lenses, Arabic education in *pesantren* can be understood as a dynamic intersection of tradition and modernity, one that must balance the preservation of classical Islamic literacy with emerging pedagogical demands for communicative competence, cognitive clarity, and learner-centered engagement. Strengthening this balance may enable *pesantren* to sustain their intellectual heritage while equipping students with broader linguistic abilities that are suited for global Islamic scholarship and modern academic contexts.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction in Indonesian *pesantren*, the field remains characterized by significant fragmentation and a lack of systematic synthesis. Scholars (Arif et al., 2023; Hamidi & Handican, 2023) have provided descriptive mappings of instructional practices and reported learning outcomes; however, they generally stop short of evaluating methodological rigor, theoretical coherence or the comparability of evidence across contexts. As a result, findings remain isolated, outcome measures

are inconsistently defined, and key constructs, such as reading proficiency, comprehension or grammatical mastery, are operationalized unevenly across studies. This fragmentation prevents cumulative knowledge-building and obscures which pedagogical approaches are effective, for whom, and under what conditions. A second issue concerns the persistent tension between the classical pedagogical heritage and emerging education innovations of *pesantren*. Traditional instructional models such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* function not merely as teaching techniques but as epistemological systems rooted in authority, lineage, and the sanctity of classical texts.

While these methods have historically safeguarded interpretive accuracy and scholarly continuity, the literature offers limited empirical clarity on how they respond to contemporary demands for measurable comprehension, learner engagement, and communicative competence. Recent studies report tentative benefits from scaffolded instruction, inductive grammar learning, peer collaboration, and selective use of digital tools, yet these innovations are unevenly implemented and weakly theorized, leaving unresolved whether they meaningfully enhance learning or risk disrupting established pedagogical cultures (Hamidi & Handican, 2023; Wekke, 2015).

Compounding this tension is a broader pattern of theoretical underdevelopment and the absence of explicit conceptual anchors in pedagogical research. Although some studies gesture toward behavioral learning, grammar–translation traditions or communicative language teaching, few systematically apply SLA theories such as sociocultural learning, constructivism or cognitive load theory to interpret instructional design or learner outcomes. Consequently, the compatibility between SLA theory and *pesantren* pedagogy remains largely hypothetical rather than empirically demonstrated (Arif et al., 2023; Wekke, 2015). Without theoretical grounding, instructional successes are often attributed to motivation or teacher charisma, while failures are moralized rather than analyzed through cognitive, interactional or developmental frameworks. This gap is particularly consequential for technological interventions, which may either scaffold comprehension or intensify cognitive load, depending on how they are integrated pedagogically.

At the same time, emerging evidence points to a set of effective instructional practices that support Arabic competency in *pesantren* contexts. Studies increasingly indicate that comprehension improves when traditional recitation is combined with structured scaffolding, such as annotated texts, guided grammatical parsing, vocabulary clustering, and interactive meaning-making tasks. Grammar instruction appears more effective when learners are supported to infer rules inductively through visual aids and peer collaboration, while vocabulary development benefits from contextualized repetition and multimodal reinforcement. These findings suggest that pedagogical effectiveness is highest when classical interpretive goals are aligned with contemporary principles of scaffolding, learner agency, and cognitive manageability.

However, the implementation of such practices is constrained by persistent structural challenges. The linguistic complexity of vowelless classical texts, pedagogical rigidity that limits learner interaction, uneven teacher preparation in Arabic pedagogy and SLA principles, and resource and infrastructure limitations continue to hinder instructional effectiveness. In many *pesantren*, learning remains heavily teacher-centered, assessment practices are underdeveloped, and innovation is restricted by institutional culture or material constraints. These challenges underscore that pedagogical outcomes are shaped by instructional choices and by systemic and contextual factors.

Beyond thematic fragmentation, a critical limitation of literature lies in the uneven methodological quality of studies that examined Arabic instruction through *Kitab Kuning*. Reviews have largely treated all studies as methodologically equivalent, without systematic appraisal of research design, sampling adequacy, data collection rigor or analytic transparency. As a result, instructional claims are often drawn from studies with limited internal validity, small or unrepresentative samples, weak outcome measures or insufficient theoretical alignment, which makes it difficult to distinguish robust evidence from context-bound or anecdotal findings.

In response to this gap, the present systematic review explicitly incorporated a structured quality appraisal and risk-of-bias assessment as an integral component of evidence synthesis. Rather than relying solely on reported outcomes, studies were evaluated according to methodological clarity, appropriateness of research design, validity of instructional and learning outcome measures, transparency of analytic procedures, and alignment between research questions, methods and conclusions. This quality-sensitive approach enables the review to weigh evidence differentially, identify recurring sources of bias, and to avoid overgeneralization by methodologically weak studies. By foregrounding study quality, the review seeks to strengthen the credibility of its conclusions and contributes both a synthesis of findings and a critical assessment of the evidentiary foundations that underpin claims relating to effective Arabic pedagogy in *pesantren* contexts.

Taken together, these patterns point to the urgent need for a comprehensive, evidence-based, and context-sensitive pedagogical framework for *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction. Accordingly, this systematic review seeks to synthesize fragmented findings, evaluate instructional effectiveness, and integrate empirical evidence with relevant learning theories while respecting *pesantren* epistemology. Rather than positioning reform as a rejection of tradition, the review aims to identify pedagogical principles that enhance comprehension, grammatical awareness, vocabulary retention, and learner engagement, without undermining the epistemological and cultural authority of classical Islamic texts. By examining instructional practices, theoretical orientations, learner characteristics, teacher preparedness, institutional typologies, and policy contexts, the study seeks to articulate a flexible framework that bridges heritage-based literacy and communicative competence, to support *pesantren* as dynamic, intellectually rigorous learning environments grounded in evidence rather than assumption.

The research questions of this study are the following: What patterns and gaps exist in studies on Arabic instruction through *Kitab Kuning* in Indonesian *pesantren*? How do *pesantren* balance traditional Arabic teaching methods with newer instructional innovations? What learning theories are used in research on Arabic pedagogy through *Kitab Kuning*, and how robust is the theoretical grounding? What evidence provided by studies can inform a context-sensitive framework for improving Arabic instruction in *pesantren*? Which teaching practices are most effective for developing Arabic language competence of *pesantren* students? What challenges do teachers and institutions face when teaching Arabic through *Kitab Kuning* in *pesantren*?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a systematic review methodology to synthesize empirical evidence on Arabic language instruction using *Kitab Kuning* at Indonesian *pesantren*. Because Arabic learning in this context involves unique pedagogical characteristics, traditional teacher-centered transmission, memorization of classical texts, and integration of linguistic and theological objectives, a systematic approach provides a structured means to evaluate empirical knowledge, compare instructional models, and identify gaps in research and practice. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021), with adaptations reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of Islamic education, applied linguistics, and curriculum studies.

### 2.2 Procedures

To compile the dataset, literature searches were conducted across several major open-access research platforms, including EBSCO, DOAJ, SSRN, OATD and SINTA. The search strategy intentionally incorporated varied terminology associated with *Kitab Kuning*, thereby acknowledging that different scholars use equivalent but not identical expressions. Search terms were tested iteratively and included phrases such as “*Kitab Kuning*,” “*Yellow Book*,” “*traditional Islamic text learning*,” “*pesantren Arabic pedagogy*,” and “*Arabic literacy in pesantren*.” The search was conducted at the title and abstract levels to filter for relevance, and only empirical or instructional studies directly examining Arabic teaching and learning through *Kitab Kuning* were shortlisted. The focus was deliberately pedagogical rather than theological, to ensure alignment with the education objectives of the study.

Selection criteria were applied to ensure rigor, comparability and relevance. Studies were included if they had been published between 2016 and 2025, were written in English or Bahasa Indonesia, situated in *pesantren* contexts, and were focused on instructional approaches to Arabic using classical texts. Publications were excluded if they lacked bibliographic completeness, provided purely theological exegesis without instructional analysis, or were situated in non-*pesantren* learning environments such as universities or informal religious gatherings. Non-peer-reviewed blog posts, opinion essays and duplicate entries were also removed. With this screening process, the study ensured that included

works represented methodologically sound contributions to pedagogical knowledge rather than historical, doctrinal or purely descriptive writing.

**Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Studies published between 2016 and 2025	Articles lacking abstracts or bibliographic completeness
Articles written in English or Bahasa Indonesia	Theological studies with no Arabic pedagogy component
Research focused on Arabic instruction using <i>Kitab Kuning</i> at <i>pesantren</i>	University-based Arabic instruction
	Duplicate or non-scholarly publications (e.g., blogs)

The search process yielded 3,433 records. After automated and manual removal of duplicates, 2,615 entries were excluded. The remaining 818 studies published between 2016 and 2025 underwent deeper evaluation. During full-text screening, 732 articles were excluded because they did not sufficiently address instructional processes, did not report learning outcomes, or focused solely on religious interpretation rather than language acquisition. The final dataset consisted of 86 eligible empirical studies (see Table 2), which became the core material for analysis. This multi-stage screening process preserved transparency and replicability and fulfilled international systematic review standards such as PRISMA and the Campbell Collaboration guidelines.

**Table 2: Corpus of articles included in the review**

A001 – Syukran (2025)	A030 – Jamaludin et al., (2019)	A059 – Wiwaha and Ramdani (2024)
A002 – Arifin et al., (2024)	A031 – Nasruddin and Amin (2022)	A060 – Jufrizal (2023)
A003 – Fauzi and Nabila (2022)	A032 – Mariyam (2021)	A061 – Izzah (2022)
A004 – Amir (2020)	A033 – Muzaky and Ishari (2020)	A062 – Rasikh (2018)
A005 – R. Daulay et al., (2024)	A034 – Rifki et al., (2024)	A063 – Rohman and Abidin (2025)
A006 – Fuadi et al., (2025)	A035 – Sulaikho (2018)	A064 – Wahyuni and Ibrahim (2017)
A007 – Hadi Rohmani (2022)	A036 – Mahfudh and Mustofa (2019)	A065 – Ardiansyah (2020)
A008 – Muttaqien et al., (2025)	A037 – Hafid and Fawaidi (2024)	A066 – Muhajirin and Zani (2024)
A009 – Maskuri et al., (2022)	A038 – Rosidin et al., (2022)	A067 – Yulianti et al., (2024)
A010 – Muhammad et al., (2025)	A039 – Paramansyah et al., (2022)	A068 – Akbar and Ismail (2018)
A011 – Burhanudin (2022)	A040 – Huda et al., (2023)	A069 – Masnawati et al., (2025)
A012 – Jamila and Navlia (2025)	A041 – Aliyah (2018)	A070 – Pasaribu and Hasibuan (2025)
A013 – Husna (2018)	A042 – Komarudin and Sudjatnika (2018)	A071 – Yanmar et al., (2023)
A014 – Makraja and Azmi (2023)	A043 – Darwati et al., (2023)	A072 – Umroh et al., (2020)
A015 – Hasibuan et al., (2018)	A044 – Hamidi and Handican (2023)	A073 – Fathurrohman et al., (2024)
A016 – Wanto (2025)	A045 – A. S. Daulay and Nasution (2022)	
A017 – Umam (2020)		

A018 – Amirudin and Rohimah (2020)	A046 – Nurjannah et al., (2022)	A074 – Elfida (2025)
A019 – Hidayah (2019)	A047 – Wafa (2024)	A075 – Nurhayati and Anam (2025)
A020 – Fakhurrrazi and Sebgag (2020)	A048 – Arif et al., (2025)	A076 – Faisol and Annuha (2022)
A021 – Arianto and Munir (2023)	A049 – Rahmawati (2022)	A077 – Kurniasari (2022)
A022 – Kholis et al., (2024)	A050 – Khabibullah et al., (2022)	A078 – Musaddad et al., (2023)
A023 – Lestari (2022)	A051 – Afifah et al., (2022)	A079 – Awaluddin et al., (2024)
A024 – Kholis and Karom (2022)	A052 – Rahmatullah and Kumara (2022)	A080 – Ghozali and Labibah (2023)
A025 – Salam et al., (2025)	A053 – Saubari et al., (2022)	A081 – Syafi’i et al., (2022)
A026 – Mahbubi et al., (2024)	A054 – Syafi’i et al., (2021)	A082 – Wildan and Fuad (2019)
A027 – Ramadhan and As’ad (2024)	A055 – Ubadah (2020)	A083 – M. S. M. Ali and Amin (2025)
A028 – Iwan (2024)	A056 – Ubaidillah et al., (2023)	A084 – Yani et al., (2023)
A029 – N. Ali and Faisol (2023)	A057 – Nurjannah (2024)	A085 – M. Ali et al., (2019)
	A058 – Hanafiah et al., (2022)	A086 – Tarihoran and Rezi (2021)

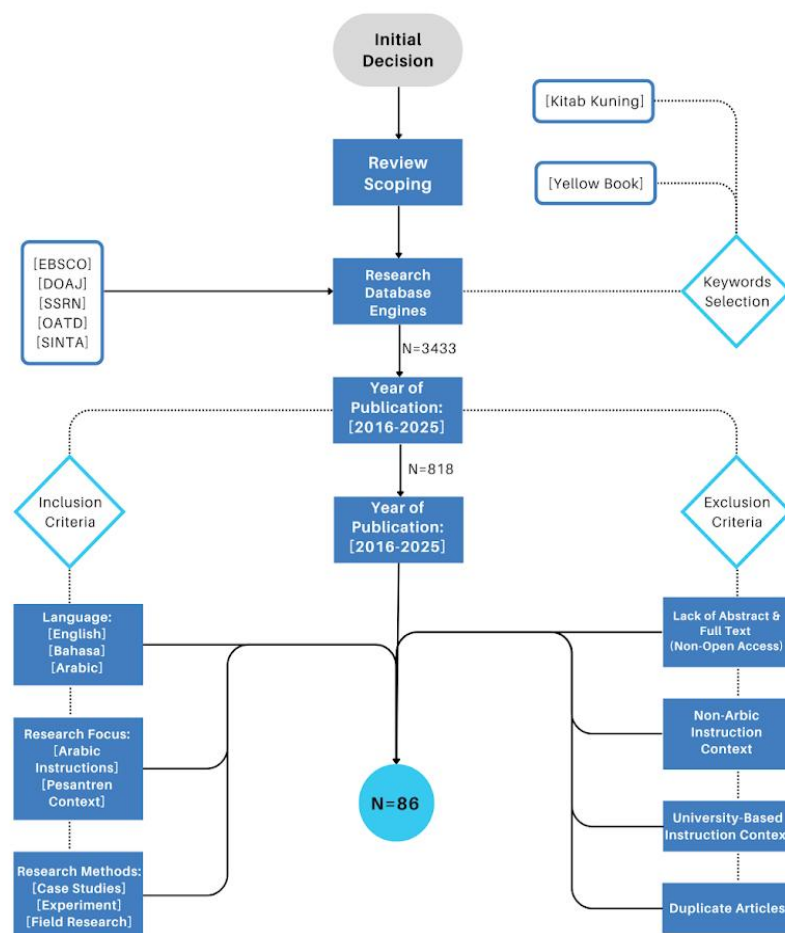


Figure 1: Systematic review flowchart

Before analysis, a review protocol was developed to ensure consistency in decision-making from search to synthesis. The protocol included detailed search strings, screening rules, and analytical procedures. It was refined through consultation with two experts in *pesantren* pedagogy and Arabic linguistics, whose input led to adjustments in coding boundaries and clarity of inclusion parameters. A pilot screening of 15 randomly selected studies was conducted to test the consistency of criterion application, after which several refinements were made to eliminate ambiguity and overlap in coding descriptors.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to develop and apply a structured coding matrix to analyze the selected studies. The coding framework was developed deductively and iteratively to ensure full alignment with the six analytic themes reported in the results section. First, to address fragmentation of research and the need for systematic synthesis, studies were coded for methodological characteristics, including research design, outcome measures, operational definitions of key constructs, and reporting transparency, which enabled cross-study comparison and identification of recurring inconsistencies.

Second, in relation to the tension between classical pedagogical heritage and emerging education innovations, instructional approaches were coded along a continuum ranging from classical *pesantren* models (e.g., *bandongan*, *sorogan*, *nahwu-şarf*, and interlinear translation) to hybrid and innovative practices that incorporate scaffolding, structured sequencing, peer interaction, and selective use of digital tools or programmatic systems such as *Tamyiz*. Third, to capture underdevelopment of theory and the absence of conceptual anchors, studies were coded for explicit or implicit use of pedagogical and SLA frameworks, including grammar-translation, communicative language teaching, sociocultural learning, constructivism, and cognitive load theory, as well as for the depth to which these frameworks informed instructional design and interpretation of outcomes.

Fourth, supporting the theme toward a framework for evidence-based, context-sensitive pedagogical reform, contextual and institutional variables such as *pesantren* typology, teacher qualifications, class size, curriculum structure, instructional sequencing, and mode of delivery (offline, online or blended) were systematically coded, thereby enabling analysis of the variation of effectiveness across settings. Fifth, in line with effective instructional practices supporting Arabic competency, learning outcomes were coded using domains synthesized and reported in the results section, namely reading comprehension, grammatical competence, vocabulary development, learner engagement, and interpretive proficiency in *Kitab Kuning* texts, to ensure direct correspondence between coding categories and reported results.

Finally, to reflect challenges experienced in implementing Arabic instruction through *Kitab Kuning*, studies were coded for recurring constraints such as textual complexity, cognitive load, pedagogical rigidity, limitations in teacher preparation, and resource or infrastructure barriers. To ensure methodological rigor and congruency, 20% of the dataset was double-coded, and followed by two

inter-coder agreement trials; discrepancies were resolved through consensus, and only coding categories that are directly represented in the results were retained.

**Table 3: Coding framework for instructional strategies, learning outcomes, contextual variables, and research methodologies in *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction**

Instructional strategy	Reported learning outcomes	Contextual information	Research methodology
Traditional ( <i>sorogan</i> , <i>bandongan</i> , interlinear translation)	Reading comprehension of Arabic texts Grammatical competence	Type of <i>pesantren</i> ( <i>salafi</i> vs. <i>khalafi</i> , rural vs. urban) Geographical location	Qualitative (e.g., ethnographic observation, interviews) Quantitative (e.g., pre-test/post-test designs, surveys)
Grammar-based ( <i>nahwu-sharf</i> , <i>qawaid wa tarjamah</i> )	Vocabulary retention or recall Learner engagement and motivation	Participant demographics (e.g., age, level of Arabic proficiency, teacher/student roles)	Mixed methods (integrating qualitative and quantitative elements)
Innovation-based ( <i>Tamyiz</i> , blended learning, digital tools) Hybrid approaches (combined traditional and modern methods)	Application of learned content to interpret <i>Kitab Kuning</i>		

### 3. Results

The findings of this systematic review are derived from a qualitative thematic synthesis of the selected studies, undertaken in response to substantial heterogeneity in research designs, instructional settings, outcome measures and analytical approaches. Because the studies included varied widely in methodological rigor and did not report comparable quantitative indicators, a statistical meta-analysis was not feasible. Instead, the analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns, convergent findings, and contextual contingencies across studies. To enhance transparency and analytic clarity, the results are organized thematically and supported by a structured summary matrix that maps instructional methods against reported learning outcomes and *pesantren* contexts. This approach allows for systematic comparison across diverse studies while preserving the contextual specificity of *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction and strengthening the interpretive robustness of the conclusions of the review.

**Table 4: Summary of instructional methods, learning outcomes, and contextual conditions in *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction**

Instructional approach	Core pedagogical features	Primary learning outcomes reported	<i>Pesantren</i> context	Study examples
<i>Bandongan</i> / oral transmission	Teacher-led reading, translation, explanation; passive listening	Text recognition; limited comprehension; low engagement	Predominantly <i>salafipesantren</i> ; large classes	A003, A009, A011
<i>Sorogan</i> (Individualized recitation)	One-on-one guided reading; corrective feedback	Improved grammatical accuracy; slow progression	Small to medium <i>pesantren</i> ; senior learners	A015, A022
Grammar-based ( <i>Nahwu-Şarf</i> )	Explicit rule instruction; parsing exercises	Grammatical awareness; limited transfer	Mixed <i>pesantren</i> types	A006, A018
Structured pedagogical innovations (e.g., <i>Tamyiz</i> )	Sequenced grammar, visual aids, inductive reasoning	Reading fluency; grammatical accuracy	Reform-oriented <i>pesantren</i>	A020, A025
Hybrid digital-assisted models	Annotated texts, digital glossaries, spaced repetition	Vocabulary retention; learner engagement	Urban/well-resourced <i>pesantren</i>	A034, A048
Collaborative and reflective practices	Peer discussion, journals, feedback cycles	Engagement; metacognitive awareness	Experimental classes	A033, A050

### 3.1 Fragmentation of Research and the Need for Systematic Synthesis

The first and most persistent issue identified in the body of literature on *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction in Southeast Asian *pesantren* is the absence of theoretical consolidation and systematic synthesis. Despite the increasing number of empirical studies, the field remains characterized by isolated findings, uneven methodologies, inconsistent terminologies, and non-comparable outcome measures. Reviews such as those of Arif et al., (2023) and Hamidi and Handican (2023) demonstrate this fragmentation: While they provide useful descriptive mapping, they do not evaluate the credibility, internal logic or interpretive rigor of the studies included. Without methodological critique, the field lacks a hierarchy of evidence, which makes it impossible to determine whether the conclusions of a study are generalizable, context-dependent or merely anecdotal. Compounding this issue, most studies remain descriptive and narrative rather than evaluative or inferential; action research, quasi-experimental research, and mixed methods remain exceedingly rare.

Furthermore, because student learning outcomes are measured inconsistently, ranging from passive decoding to active meaning construction, there is no shared benchmark for proficiency. Meanwhile, policy environments continue evolving: the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs increasingly emphasizes measurable learning outcomes and communicative competence (Selamet et al., 2022), yet there is little scholarly consensus on how these outcomes should be conceptualized or assessed. Similarly, international frameworks for heritage language pedagogy, classical text literacy, and bilingual scriptural learning exist but are seldom

applied. Thus, a theoretically grounded synthesis is no longer optional – it is a necessary intervention to organize existing knowledge, evaluate its validity, and establish conceptual clarity for future research and applied reform.

A further concern linked to fragmentation is the absence of shared methodological, terminological, and assessment standards across studies, which makes comparison and cumulative knowledge-building nearly impossible. For example, the term reading proficiency is used inconsistently: In some studies, it refers merely to sounding out text aloud, while in others it implies grammatical parsing, interpretive analysis or even theological reasoning embedded in the text. Similarly, instructional strategies are described using heterogeneous labels such as *bandongan*, *halaqah*, *sorogan* or *talqin*, yet these terms may represent different enactments depending on institutional lineage, teacher training or regional tradition.

The absence of standard operational definitions means researchers often measure different phenomena while assuming comparability. Moreover, few studies explicitly report effect sizes, learner starting proficiency, instructional duration or teacher expertise, which makes replication impossible. Therefore, a systematic review is intended to move beyond summarizing trends by formalizing a shared scholarly vocabulary, measurement frameworks, and interpretive criteria, to lay the foundation for a cumulative science of *Kitab Kuning* pedagogy that can meaningfully inform future empirical studies, teacher training, and state-level education planning.

### **3.2 Tension Between Classical Pedagogical Heritage and Emerging Education Innovations**

The second theme concerns the interplay between long-established *pesantren* pedagogical traditions and modern education innovations. Classical instructional systems, especially *bandongan* and *sorogan*, do not merely constitute teaching techniques but an epistemological worldview in which knowledge is transmitted hierarchically and anchored in lineage, authority, and the sacred textuality of the classical corpus. Historically, these methods served the purpose of preserving interpretive accuracy, jurisprudential continuity, and scholarly identity; thus, their endurance is partly cultural, partly theological. However, modern education demands, such as literacy benchmarks, national qualification frameworks, communicative language teaching, and digital tools, expose the structural limitations of these traditional systems.

Numerous case studies suggest that, without guided scaffolding or structured processing tasks, students may decode textual forms without achieving genuine comprehension or communicative competence. Meanwhile, *pesantren* that are experimenting with blended learning, systematic grammar sequences, peer-assisted learning, and digital glossing tools report increased learner engagement and comprehension, yet these early findings remain tentative and lack rigorous empirical validation. The success of pedagogical innovation is heavily conditioned by factors such as *pesantren* typology (*salafi* institutions tend to resist modification), class size (large cohorts weaken individualized support), teacher

literacy in SLA methodologies (often limited), and resource accessibility. The literature suggests that neither a wholesale rejection of tradition nor a wholehearted embrace of modernity is appropriate.

This tension becomes even more evident when examining how *pesantren* stakeholders justify or critique pedagogical modernization. For many traditional teachers, the classical approach is believed to cultivate *adab* (scholarly discipline), humility, and interpretive caution—qualities viewed as essential for religious scholarship. In contrast, proponents of reform argue that passive absorption does not guarantee comprehension and that meaningful literacy requires opportunities for interaction, clarification, application, and reflection. Meanwhile, students themselves are caught between expectations of intellectual obedience to tradition and growing exposure to digital learning norms, communicative language models, and outcome-based assessments in other subjects.

Some *pesantren* resolve this tension by sequencing instructional models over time, for example, starting with classical oral transmission and later introducing structured grammar, collaborative tasks, and technology-enhanced learning. These varied implementations reflect educational philosophy as well as processes of identity negotiation: *pesantren* must determine whether innovation is a threat, a necessity or an opportunity to revitalize tradition.

### **3.3 Theoretical Underdevelopment and Absence of Conceptual Anchors in Pedagogical Research**

A third major challenge is the lack of theoretical grounding in both research design and pedagogical interpretation. While studies occasionally reference broad pedagogical frameworks, most do so superficially, without operationalizing concepts into instructional models or measurable learning components. Key theories such as sociocultural learning, constructivism, and cognitive load theory offer highly relevant explanatory frameworks but remain underutilized. A sociocultural perspective suggests that learning occurs through guided participation, shared meaning-making, and scaffolded interaction; thus, traditional *pesantren* practices may be effective only to the degree that interaction is dialogic rather than monologic.

Constructivist theory emphasizes active meaning construction, learner agency, and the importance of problem-solving tasks; this framework questions whether grammar-translation and interlinear reading foster deep literacy or merely rehearsed decoding. Cognitive load theory provides insight into why novice learners may struggle: Classical texts contain dense syntax, rare vocabulary, and layered theological meaning, which makes the texts cognitively demanding in the absence of structured progression or support tools. Without theoretical framing, innovations such as AI glossaries, morphological analysis platforms, and structured grammar drills risk becoming superficial add-ons rather than thoughtfully integrated learning supports.

The absence of theoretical grounding also limits the ability of researchers and practitioners to interpret why certain pedagogical interventions succeed or fail

across different contexts. Without conceptual frameworks, instructional outcomes are often explained using subjective impressions rather than evidence-based reasoning. For instance, when innovations lead to improved comprehension, success is frequently attributed to student motivation or teacher enthusiasm rather than principles such as reduced extraneous cognitive load, scaffolded meaning-making or increased learner agency. Conversely, when reforms fail, explanations are often moralized, students are “lazy” or teachers “lack commitment,” rather than analyzing the failure through theories of input sequencing, working memory constraints, task complexity, or sociocultural mediation. Theoretical grounding would also allow *pesantren* researchers to connect local findings with broader global scholarship in SLA, heritage language literacy, Islamic pedagogy, and bilingual education. This intellectual linkage is crucial for elevating *Kitab Kuning* research from context-specific description to internationally recognized pedagogy theory.

### **3.4 Toward a Framework for Evidence-Based, Context-Sensitive Pedagogical Reform**

The final theme that emerged from the literature is the need for a comprehensive pedagogical framework that integrates empirical evidence, theoretical insight, and *pesantren* epistemology. Such a framework would move beyond synthesizing existing findings by also guiding future practice in a manner that respects the cultural and scholarly identity of Islamic education. This involves determining which teaching methods work best for which learner populations, under what conditions, and with what forms of institutional support. A systematic review can reveal relationships between instructional strategies, teacher qualifications, *pesantren* typologies, learner demographics, and measurable learning outcomes.

It can also identify curricular blind spots, such as the absence of structured progression in vocabulary acquisition, insufficient assessment frameworks or the absence of training in classical rhetorical structures. Beyond research contributions, the framework would function as a practical tool: Teachers could make informed pedagogical choices, curriculum developers could design scaffolding sequences aligned with classical texts, and policymakers could adopt guidelines that elevate learning outcomes without undermining the spiritual and cultural heritage of *Kitab Kuning* scholarship.

Developing such a framework requires acknowledging that *pesantren* operate as holistic learning ecosystems rather than conventional language classrooms. Language instruction cannot be separated from social hierarchies, spiritual purpose, living tradition, and institutional memory. Thus, effective reform must emphasize scalability, adaptability, and cultural compatibility rather than uniform standardization. A context-sensitive framework would likely involve a tiered model of competencies, ranging from decoding skills and grammatical awareness to interpretive reasoning and discursive competence grounded in Islamic scholarly tradition. It would also provide structured options rather than prescriptive mandates, to allow *pesantren* to adopt strategies based on learner profile, teacher capability, available resources, and institutional identity. Importantly, such a framework would also establish assessment pathways that

measure comprehension meaningfully, rather than focusing solely on recitation fluency or memorization accuracy. In doing so, it would create a bridge between national educational standards and *pesantren* cultural identity, to ensure that learners gain both the epistemic values of classical Islamic scholarship and the literacy skills necessary to engage critically with authoritative texts. Ultimately, the envisioned framework would function as both a roadmap and a negotiation space, one that respects tradition while empowering *pesantren* to evolve as dynamic, intellectually rich learning environments grounded in evidence rather than assumption.

### **3.5 Effective Instructional Practices Supporting Arabic Competency in Pesantren Education**

Findings from the reviewed studies indicate that a range of instructional strategies are used to support Arabic language acquisition in *pesantren*, and these approaches vary in purpose, design, and pedagogical orientation. While the traditional transmission of *Kitab Kuning* remains culturally authoritative, recent pedagogical adaptations demonstrate a shift toward structured, scaffolded, and learner-responsive instruction. Across the selected corpus of six representative studies (A002, A005, A018, A025, A037, and A039), four interrelated areas of instructional improvement emerged: reading comprehension, grammar competence, vocabulary development, and learner engagement. These patterns suggest that the most effective learning environments are those that integrate classical interpretive goals with contemporary principles from second-language pedagogy, including scaffolding, multimodal learning, and learner autonomy.

Reading comprehension emerged as the most consistently supported skill area across the dataset, thereby reflecting the central role of text interpretation in *Kitab Kuning*-based learning. Because classical Arabic texts contain complex syntactic structures, advanced lexical forms, and are printed without diacritics, students benefit from structured forms of guided recitation, most commonly the *bandongan* method, paired with targeted translation drills. Studies A002, A005, A013, A016, and A031 demonstrate that students' comprehension improved when teachers provided pre-reading scaffolds, including annotated texts, structured glossaries, and worksheets designed to reduce cognitive load. Rather than passively listening to teacher exposition, students increasingly engaged in syntactic segmentation activities by breaking sentences into grammatical units before negotiating meaning.

This shift from passive reception to active decoding supports SLA principles related to intentional processing and form-meaning mapping. According to A020, students who used visual prompts to identify recurring syntactic patterns demonstrated a 40% increase in reading accuracy, which illustrates how guided interpretation can facilitate text comprehension while maintaining the epistemic authority of the classical corpus. These findings suggest that reading comprehension improves most effectively when traditional recitation is embedded in structured meaning-making tasks rather than used as a standalone practice.

Grammar proficiency remains foundational in *pesantren* Arabic learning, because precise morpho-syntactic understanding is essential for interpreting vowelless text. However, the reviewed studies indicate a gradual methodological shift from rule-memorization toward inductive and scaffolded learning. In studies A006, A007, A018, A025, and A037, grammar instruction incorporated visual aids such as color-coded parsing maps, morphological cards, and arrow-based syntax charts to help learners identify grammatical functions in context. These tools supported learners in recognizing patterns, applying rules autonomously, and generalizing knowledge across textual examples.

Progressive sequencing, as reported in A022 and A039, also enabled more cognitively manageable transitions from basic nominal structures to complex verbal sentences. Peer collaboration, furthermore, supported inductive reasoning; studies A027 and A043 report that group-based parsing and peer-corrected assignments increased confidence and reduced teacher dependency. Collectively, these findings align with constructivist and sociocultural theories by demonstrating that grammar learning is strengthened when learners infer rules through supported interaction rather than relying solely on teacher explanation or memorized formulas.

Vocabulary development emerged as a key factor that influenced students' ability to interpret classical texts. Because *Kitab Kuning* contains both archaic expressions and terminology common to Islamic scholarly discourse, studies indicate that contextualized and repeated exposure fostered deeper semantic retention. In A009–A051, vocabulary was taught through thematic clusters, multilingual glossaries, imitation of sermons, and summarization tasks that reinforced contextual use rather than isolated memorization. Digital extensions, such as spaced-repetition software, flashcard applications, and voice-note pronunciation tools, strengthened long-term recall further, especially when used during independent study periods. In A034, students who engaged in mobile-based vocabulary review demonstrated significantly higher retention during delayed assessments. Additionally, studies such as A036 and A044 highlight the added benefit of learner-generated example sentences, which fostered greater internalization and transferability than teacher-supplied models. The combined evidence demonstrates that vocabulary proficiency is most effectively developed when repetition, contextual use, and multimodal reinforcement operate together.

A final pattern across the selected studies highlights a gradual shift toward more interactive, reflective, and learner-centered practices aimed at increasing motivation and participation. Although *pesantren* learning has historically emphasized collective listening and teacher-led exposition, recent studies show that active learning strategies can improve confidence, agency, and persistence. Across A010–A050, peer instruction, collaborative *tafsir* discussions, interactive grammar games, and feedback-driven quizzes were implemented to make learning more dialogic. In A048, students used reflection learning journals to track comprehension difficulties, set weekly goals, and self-monitor progress, an approach aligned with metacognitive development models in SLA research. Teacher behavior also influenced engagement; targeted encouragement and

personalized feedback in A046 and A052 reduced anxiety during text interpretation and fostered a more supportive learning culture. Group-based projects, as reported in A033, were particularly beneficial for students who were hesitant to participate, enabled social scaffolding and confidence-building.

### 3.6 Challenges Implementing Arabic Instruction Through *Kitab Kuning*

Although *Kitab Kuning* remains a defining pedagogical and cultural artifact in Indonesian *pesantren*, several deeply rooted issues continue to constrain its instructional effectiveness. A thematic synthesis of 35 relevant studies reveals four major recurring challenges: cognitive load and textual complexity, pedagogical rigidity and learner passivity, teacher preparedness and professional limitations, and resource and infrastructure constraints. Collectively, these challenges suggest that, while *Kitab Kuning* provides historical continuity and scholarly legitimacy, its instructional delivery is often misaligned with modern language learning needs, especially those of novice learners.

The linguistic demands embedded within *Kitab Kuning* consistently emerge as a major source of difficulty for learners. Studies (A006, A018, A024, A036) demonstrate that the absence of vowel markers (*tashkīl*), archaic lexical forms, dense syntax, and unfamiliar rhetorical devices significantly burden cognitive processing, especially for students with limited foundational proficiency. Many *pesantren* continue to rely on memorization-based learning, as shown in A013 and A033, without providing scaffolds such as translation support, morphological marking, or guided practice structures. When learners encounter long clauses or complex grammatical structures without modeling or chunking strategies, the instructional process exceeds working memory capacity, which is a pattern aligned with Sweller's cognitive load theory.

Then, a more detailed examination shows that these cognitive barriers do not originate solely from textual features, but also from instructional pacing and expectations. Because many *pesantren* treat *Kitab Kuning* as a sacred text rather than a learning tool, students often feel hesitant to annotate, question, or restructure content. This reinforces passive decoding rather than deep comprehension. Without supplementary materials such as bilingual glossaries, structured grammar references, or learner-friendly reading pathways, the text remains inaccessible for emerging learners.

Traditional *pesantren* methodologies such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* remain central to identity formation and scholarly continuity, yet research (A009, A011, A015, A022) repeatedly critiques their high dependency on teacher authority and lack of learner interaction. As reported by classroom observations (A003), students are often required to listen silently while the teacher reads, translates, and explains meanings, which limits opportunities for questioning, negotiation of meaning or collaborative learning. This approach preserves hierarchical knowledge transmission but restricts the development of critical reading strategies, interpretive autonomy, and communicative competence, which are essential for second-language learning. A broader analysis of student learning trajectories shows that this rigidity is reinforced by the absence of structured formative

assessment or responsive teaching practices. Study A016 demonstrates that few teachers employ diagnostic tools, progress tracking mechanisms, or task-based evaluation to differentiate instruction. As a result, learning is uniform rather than adaptive, and outcomes depend heavily on student persistence rather than pedagogical support. Over time, this rigidity creates a culture in which textual mastery is equated with ritual completion rather than cognitive engagement or applied understanding. While tradition protects epistemic lineage, the lack of dynamic pedagogical interaction risks reducing *Kitab Kuning* study to symbolic literacy rather than functional competence.

Another significant finding concerns the variability and gaps in teacher preparation. Research (A014, A025, A030, A045) indicates that many *pesantren* educators rely on inherited instructional practices rather than modern Arabic pedagogy principles. Although many teachers possess strong religious knowledge and personal fluency, they often lack systematic training in curriculum design, instructional methodology, or SLA principles. Studies A004 and A027, furthermore, show that limited familiarity with technological tools, updated grammar frameworks, or learner support strategies constrain the ability to innovate classroom practices.

This pattern is compounded by institutional culture, which sometimes assigns teaching roles according to scholarly seniority or religious charisma rather than pedagogical qualification. Research A048 reports inconsistencies in teaching quality that result from the absence of structured professional development, peer observation or centralized curriculum guidance. Without ongoing training, teacher practice remains static despite evolving learner needs. These gaps indicate that instructional quality is shaped by teacher competence and systemic constraints that prevent teachers from transitioning toward more responsive, evidence-based instruction.

Many *pesantren* operate with limited educational resources, especially those in rural or economically constrained environments. Studies A017–A028 describe shortages of essential materials such as printed texts, dictionaries, writing supplies, and supplementary reading materials. Limited technological access, furthermore, restricts innovation; A035 reports that digital learning initiatives were unsuccessful in several *pesantren* because of unstable electricity, inadequate devices or lack of internet access. This situation reinforces reliance on oral transmission and teacher-centered instruction.

Furthermore, the absence of standardized curriculum frameworks leads to instructional inconsistency across institutions. Study A010 reports on *pesantren* with no written syllabus, which leave lesson sequencing and content emphasis entirely up to individual teacher discretion. This creates significant variability in learning outcomes and makes systematic progression difficult. In well-resourced *pesantren*, instruction is more structured, but nationwide alignment remains fragmented. Thus, infrastructural limitations restrict learning conditions and simultaneously perpetuate unequal access to effective Arabic education across *pesantren* types.

#### 4. Discussion

This systematic review synthesizes recent empirical research on *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction in Indonesian *pesantren* and identifies several convergent patterns concerning pedagogical orientation, learning outcomes, and contextual constraints. The findings demonstrate that classical instructional modes, most notably *bandongan* and *sorogan*, remain central to *pesantren* epistemology and continue to structure learners' engagement with authoritative Arabic texts. At the same time, the reviewed studies reveal a gradual yet discernible shift toward more structured, scaffolded, and, in some cases, technology-supported instructional designs.

Across the corpus, improvements in reading comprehension, grammatical competence, vocabulary retention, and learner engagement were most consistently associated with pedagogical arrangements that integrated traditional textual transmission with explicit instructional sequencing, guided practice, and opportunities for interaction. Interpretation of these results suggests that the pedagogical efficacy of *bandongan* and *sorogan* is contingent upon their instructional mediation rather than their formal presence alone. While these methods historically function to preserve interpretive accuracy, ethical discipline, and scholarly continuity, multiple studies indicate that their monologic implementation may constrain active meaning construction and learner agency. Empirical evidence reported by Kim et al., (2025) shows that classrooms that are characterized by structured sequencing, peer-assisted learning, and guided practice yield significantly stronger learning outcomes than those relying predominantly on oral exposition.

These findings corroborate earlier critiques of passive reception in *bandongan* and support the view that classical pedagogical forms are most effective when they are embedded within structured learning designs. Similarly, the Manhaji method proposed by Rofi'i (2024) illustrates how systematically sequenced grammar-reading instruction can enhance learners' interpretive control over classical texts while remaining epistemologically consonant with *pesantren* tradition. Parallel evidence from Zaenuri and Baroroh (2025), furthermore, indicates that focused *nahwu*-based materials contribute to measurable gains in grammatical accuracy and reading precision, which underscores the pedagogical viability of structured textual instruction in traditional institutional settings.

The review, furthermore, highlights the expanding role of digital and blended instructional innovations in *pesantren*-based Arabic education. Studies incorporating multimedia resources, such as the STEM-literacy e-books examined by Fauzi et al., (2025), report improvements in reading comprehension and learner motivation, and suggest that digital scaffolding can facilitate engagement with syntactically dense classical texts. However, the findings also caution against uncritical adoption of innovation. Hasan and Anshory (2024) and Syagif (2024) argue that Arabic literacy development in communicative language teaching frameworks is optimized when cognitive demands are carefully managed through reduced initial workload, delayed explicit grammar instruction, and strong visual support. Yasin's (2025) experimental work, furthermore,

demonstrates that excessive cognitive pressure, particularly when learners are required to process complex *Kitab Kuning* passages without adequate scaffolding, negatively affects comprehension, retention, and sustained engagement. Collectively, these findings indicate that instructional effectiveness depends less on the novelty of pedagogical tools than on their alignment with learners' cognitive capacity and developmental readiness. Teacher expertise and theoretical orientation emerge as additional determinants of pedagogical effectiveness. Although explicit theoretical articulation remains limited across the reviewed studies, several investigations implicitly draw on principles associated with sociocultural learning and cognitive psychology.

For instance, recent virtual reality-based memory studies demonstrate that cognitive load constraints persist even in technologically enriched environments, thereby reinforcing established insights from multimedia learning theory. These patterns suggest that *pesantren* pedagogy undergoes a gradual process of internal transformation through which tradition is not displaced but recontextualized through increased awareness of instructional design, learner cognition, and scaffolding. The growing presence of younger educators, expanding access to digital resources, and increased circulation of pedagogical research appear to facilitate the emergence of hybrid instructional models that retain theological authenticity while addressing contemporary educational expectations.

The implications of these findings are threefold. At a theoretical level, this review demonstrates that *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic instruction can be systematically interpreted through an integrated framework that draws on sociocultural theory, constructivist pedagogy, and cognitive load theory, thereby addressing a persistent gap in a largely descriptive body of research. At a pedagogical level, the evidence suggests that effective instruction does not require abandoning classical methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, but rather situating them within structured, scaffolded designs that promote comprehension, interaction, and progressive skills development. At institutional and policy levels, the findings indicate that pedagogical modernization can be aligned with *pesantren* epistemology when reform is framed as enhancement rather than replacement of tradition. In this respect, the study contributes to broader discussions of heritage language education and faith-based schooling by demonstrating how cultural authenticity and instructional efficacy could be reconciled through evidence-based practice.

## 5. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The corpus was derived primarily from open-access databases, which may have excluded relevant studies published in subscription-based international journals. The reliance on the term "*Kitab Kuning*" in title-level searches may have resulted in the omission of conceptually related studies that employed alternative terminology. Furthermore, methodological heterogeneity across the reviewed studies precluded quantitative meta-analysis and necessitated reliance on qualitative synthesis. Although coding procedures were systematic and partially cross-validated, interpretive bias cannot be eliminated entirely. Finally, the predominance of Indonesian *pesantren* contexts

limits the generalizability of the findings to other Islamic education settings. Nonetheless, these limitations do not undermine the validity of the conclusions; rather, they highlight avenues for future research, including cross-regional comparative studies, mixed-method designs, standardized outcome measures, and more explicit theoretical operationalization. Such efforts would advance further understanding of how *Kitab Kuning*-based Arabic education can continue to evolve while preserving its epistemological and cultural foundations.

## 6. Conclusion

This systematic review addressed the persistent problem of understanding how Arabic instruction based on *Kitab Kuning* is conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated at Indonesian *pesantren*, particularly in the absence of systematic synthesis and explicit theoretical anchoring. By analyzing 86 empirically grounded studies, the review examined instructional strategies, and reports on learning outcomes, contextual variables, and methodological orientations that shape Arabic language education in *pesantren* settings. The findings demonstrate that classical pedagogical practices, most notably *sorogan* and *bandongan*, continue to function as the epistemological core of *Kitab Kuning* instruction, sustaining textual authority, interpretive accuracy, and religious intellectual tradition.

However, the review also found that, when these practices are implemented in predominantly teacher-centered and monologic forms, they often provide limited scaffolding for learner autonomy, interactive feedback, and progressive language development. In response to these limitations, a growing body of research documents the emergence of structured, innovation-oriented instructional models, including grammar-sequenced approaches, the *Tamyiz* system, blended learning, and digitally supported instruction. Across studies, improvements in reading comprehension, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary retention, and learner engagement were most consistently associated with pedagogical designs that combined explicit instructional sequencing, visual and cognitive scaffolding, cooperative learning, and the gradual introduction of grammatical complexity.

Despite these pedagogical advancements, the review identifies enduring challenges that constrain instructional effectiveness. These include excessive cognitive load arising from dense, ungraded textual materials, limited teacher training in Arabic pedagogy, institutional reliance on teacher-centered delivery, and unequal access to instructional technologies, because of infrastructural disparities. Moreover, while many studies implicitly reflect principles associated with constructivist learning, sociocultural theory, and cognitive load theory, such as inductive grammar discovery, peer-supported translation, and scaffolded interaction, explicit theoretical frameworks remain largely underdeveloped.

This theoretical underarticulation contributes to fragmentation in the research landscape and limits the cumulative development of evidence-based pedagogical models. The key implication of this review is that pedagogical reform in *pesantren* does not require the abandonment of classical instructional heritage but rather its systematic reconfiguration through context-sensitive, theory-informed instructional design. The evidence suggests that *pesantren* are particularly well

positioned to adopt hybrid pedagogical frameworks that preserve epistemological continuity while enhancing instructional effectiveness. For educators, this entails prioritizing structured scaffolding, learner interaction, and cognitive manageability in *Kitab Kuning* instruction. For institutional leaders and policymakers, the findings underscore the need for sustained teacher professional development, curriculum refinement, and infrastructural support. Future research should move beyond isolated case studies toward longitudinal, mixed-method investigations that examine the scalability, sustainability, and theoretical coherence of hybrid instructional models across diverse *pesantren* contexts.

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