



Competency Gap in Graduates and Innovation in Arabic Language Learning in the Global Era

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Abstract :

This research is motivated by the increasing gap between the competence of graduates and the needs of the world of work, as well as the inequality of access and quality of education, especially in Arabic language learning which is still dominated by theoretical approaches. This study aims to analyze the factors that cause the gap and formulate relevant and contextual solutions. The method used is a qualitative approach with a case study design in schools in rural areas with limited resources. Data is collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed through the stages of condensation, reduction, display, and data verification using triangulation techniques. The results of the study show that the gap is caused by the dominance of theory-based learning, limited facilities and technology, and low teacher competence in implementing innovative learning. In the context of Arabic, this has an impact on the weakness of communicative skills such as maharah al-kalam and maharah al-istima'. In conclusion, integrative and competency-based learning reforms are needed. This research contributes to enriching the study of education by emphasizing the importance of contextual and innovative approaches in improving the quality of Arabic language learning.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and technological advancement, the problems faced by the education sector are increasingly complex and require serious attention (Al'Alim et al., 2023; Muhdar et al., 2023). One of the main issues is the imbalance between educational output and the needs of the job market. Many graduates face difficulties in obtaining jobs that match their skills, due to the gap between the education they receive and the practical skills required in the world of work (Iman et al., 2025; Yun Sari, 2024). According to research conducted by Education System in the XXI Century: Problems and Solutions, educational methods that still focus on memorization and theory neglect the development of practical skills, which contributes to the unpreparedness of graduates to face the demands of the industry (Fauzan & Sulaeman, 2024; Mohzana, 2024; Sajja, Sermet, & Demir, 2025; Wiratmuko et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is important because it aims to present solutions to this problem, as well as provide recommendations to improve the quality of education to be more relevant to market needs.

In the context of Arabic language education, this problem is also obvious. Arabic language learning in many educational institutions still tends to be oriented

towards grammatical aspects (nahwu and sharaf) and vocabulary memorization, without being balanced with the strengthening of communicative skills such as maharah al-kalam (speaking) and maharah al-istima' (listening). As a result, graduates often have good theoretical knowledge, but are less able to actively use Arabic in the context of real communication, both in the academic and professional worlds. This condition widens the gap between the competence of graduates and the needs of the world of work, especially in the fields of education, translation, diplomacy, and Islamic-based industries that require applicable Arabic language skills.

One of the fundamental problems in education today is the failure of the education system to prepare students with the practical skills needed in the job market (Fadli Hidayat et al., 2024; Habibi et al., 2026; Wiratmuko et al., 2023). Many of the education systems still rely on traditional approaches that emphasize memorization and theory (Hartati et al., 2024; A. A. Putri et al., 2025; Sajja, Sermet, Cwiertny, et al., 2025). In the context of Arabic language education, this approach causes learning to be less contextual and irrelevant to global communication needs, even though Arabic has a strategic role as an international language, a religious language, and a language of science.

In addition, the existence of a gap between educational facilities in urban and rural areas exacerbates this problem, where schools in less developed areas often do not have access to adequate educational technology (Halkiopoulos & Gkintoni, 2024; Hartati et al., 2024; Nasrin et al., 2025; Prosen & Ličen, 2025; A. A. Putri et al., 2025; Siti Nur Patimah & Moh. Ibnu Faruk Fauzi, 2023). In learning Arabic, this limitation has an impact on the lack of use of digital media such as interactive learning applications, online conversation platforms, and access to authentic Arabic resources. This leads to inequality in the quality of Arabic language learning, which ultimately has implications for the low competence of graduates in various regions.

The phenomenon that occurs in the field shows that there is a gap between graduates who have skills and those who do not have practical skills (Capraro et al., 2024; Liu & Hu, 2025; Rodliyah et al., 2024). In the context of Arabic, this gap can be seen from the difference in ability between graduates who only master linguistic theory and those who are able to use Arabic communicatively and professionally. This is a big challenge, especially in the era of globalization which demands mastery of foreign languages as one of the main competencies. Another phenomenon is the high dropout rate, especially among students from underprivileged families (Samala et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2022), which also has an impact on low access to quality Arabic language learning. This condition exacerbates social disparities and widens the poverty gap, as education, including mastery of foreign languages such as Arabic, is one of the main keys to achieving social mobility (Anton & Van Ryzin, 2024).

Several previous studies have highlighted the problem of an imbalance between education and the needs of the job market. Research by Modern Science and Education: Problems and Solutions shows that the quality of education is highly dependent on teacher performance and training (Aluko & Ooko, 2022; Feszterová, 2024; Karwadi et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2025). In Arabic language learning, teacher competence is a key factor, especially in integrating communicative approaches, the use of technology, and student-centered learning-based learning strategies. This shows the importance of improving teacher competence, especially in mastering educational technology and teaching methodologies that are more modern and based on active learning approaches (Baidowi & Alsulami, 2025; Haşlaman et al., 2023; Rasmitadila et al., 2025; Zaqiah et al., 2024). However,

although many studies provide solutions related to improving the quality of teaching and infrastructure, there are still research gaps related to the implementation of such solutions in areas with limited resources (Adeoye & Baharun, 2025; Ismiatun et al., 2023; Riatmaja et al., 2025).

This research brings novelty by introducing a more integrated and comprehensive educational solution, which focuses not only on improving the quality of teaching but also on structural reforms in the education system, including in Arabic language learning. The proposed approach includes the integration between the mastery of linguistic theory with communicative skills, the use of digital technology in Arabic language learning, and the strengthening of a curriculum based on the needs of the world of work. Given that education systems in many developing countries are still stuck in a rigid approach, it is crucial to find a middle ground between improving the quality of teaching and the use of educational technologies, as well as a more equitable distribution of resources to areas that lack facilities.

This research will answer key questions related to how to address imbalances in education and the job market and reduce gaps in access and quality of education in various regions, including in the context of Arabic language learning. By analyzing the factors that affect inequality in education, we hope to contribute in the form of practical solutions that can be applied at various levels, from education policy, Arabic curriculum innovation, teacher training, to the use of adaptive and inclusive learning technologies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach. The choice of this design is based on the need to understand the phenomenon of education in depth in a specific context, i.e. in schools that have limited access to educational resources. The case studies allow researchers to dig into the data in more detail and present a more realistic picture of the challenges faced by education in these areas.

This research will be carried out in several schools in rural areas that have limited access to educational facilities, both in terms of technology and teacher training, one of them is SMP NURUL AMIN. This location was chosen because it shows a significant educational gap between urban and rural areas, as well as providing insight into the challenges faced by schools in underdeveloped areas. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and some students. In addition, data will also be collected through direct observation in selected schools, as well as document analysis related to education policies implemented in the area.

Data analysis in this study is carried out through several systematic stages, namely data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification. At the data condensation stage, the researcher filters and summarizes important information obtained from interviews and observations. Furthermore, data reduction is carried out by grouping data into relevant themes to make it more structured and easy to analyze. The data that has been reduced is then presented in the form of a table or diagram at the data display stage to make it easier to understand and draw conclusions. The final stage is data verification, which is ensuring the validity and consistency of data through the triangulation process. The validity of the data was tested using triangulation methods (interviews, observations, and documentation) and triangulation of sources (teachers, students,

and principals). In addition data validation is also strengthened by comparing research findings with relevant literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Qualitative Results

The Gap between Graduate Competencies and the Needs of the World of Work

The gap between graduate competencies and the needs of the world of work in this study is defined as a mismatch between the abilities that students have after completing their education and the skills needed by the world of work, especially in the aspects of practical skills, communication, and problem-solving. Operationally, this gap is identified through students' low ability to apply knowledge contextually, lack of practical experience, and limited integration of skills-based learning in the learning process in the school studied.

In the context of Arabic language education, this gap is also seen in the low ability of students to master language skills in an applicative manner, such as maharah al-kalam (speaking), maharah al-istima' (listening), and the ability to translate and understand Arabic texts contextually. Learning that focuses too much on qawa'id (nahwu and sharaf) causes students to be less trained in using Arabic in real situations, both in academic and professional communication.

Based on the results of interviews with teachers, information was obtained that "Most of our students do understand theory well, but when asked to practice or solve real problems, they are still confused and lack confidence." In learning Arabic, this condition is reflected in students who are able to memorize rules, but have difficulty speaking or understanding simple conversations. The researcher interprets that this condition shows the dominance of theory-based learning approaches over practice. An interview with the principal revealed that "We realized that our graduates are still under-employed, especially in terms of technical and communication skills." In the context of Arabic, this shows that graduates do not have adequate communicative competencies for the needs of the world of work such as teaching, translation, and the field of global-based Islam.

The results of the observation show that learning is still dominated by lecture methods and the use of textbooks. In learning Arabic, this is characterized by a lack of conversation (hiwar), discussion (munaqasyah), and simulated use of language in a real context. Based on these findings, it can be affirmed that the gap in Arabic language education is caused by the dominance of theoretical learning, which ignores the strengthening of communicative skills as the main competency.

Table 1. The Gap between Graduate Competencies and the Needs of the World of Work

Informant Position	Interview Excerpts	Indicator
Teacher	"Students understand theory, but struggle in practice."	Low practical skills
Principal	"Graduates are less job-ready, especially in technical skills."	Low work readiness
Teacher	"Our focus is still on completing the curriculum."	Dominance of theoretical learning

The table shows that all informants have relatively uniform views regarding the low practical competence of students. In the context of Arabic language education, this condition is reflected in the ability of students who tend to be strong in mastering linguistic theories such as qawa'id (nahwu and sharaf), but weak in applicative skills such as maharah al-kalam (speaking), maharah al-istima' (listening), and the ability to understand texts contextually. Teachers highlight the weakness of students' practical skills even though they understand theory, while principals emphasize that graduates are not ready to face the world of work. This indicates that the problems that occur are not individual, but systemic and comprehensive in the educational process, including in learning Arabic.

Furthermore, the indicators that emerged showed a close relationship between learning orientation and the results achieved by students. In Arabic language learning, the focus on curriculum completion often encourages teachers to emphasize cognitive and theoretical aspects, such as mastery of rules and translation (qawa'id wa tarjamah), rather than the development of communicative skills. As a result, students get less opportunities to practice using Arabic in real-life situations, so their practical skills are neglected. This condition has a direct impact on the low job readiness of graduates, especially in fields that require active Arabic language competence, such as teaching, translation, and professional communication. In the end, this situation further strengthens the gap between the world of education and the world of work in the context of Arabic language proficiency that is applicable and relevant to global demands.

Inequality of Access and Quality of Education between Regions

Inequality of access and quality of education in this study is defined as significant differences in the availability of educational resources, the quality of infrastructure, and opportunities for teacher competency development between schools in rural and urban areas. In the context of Arabic language education, this inequality can be seen from differences in access to Arabic learning resources, such as digital media, native speaker learning videos, Arabic language applications, and modern books or references. Schools in rural areas tend to have limitations in accessing authentic Arabic resources, so learning becomes less contextual and non-communicative.

Based on interviews with teachers, it was stated that "We are very limited in the use of technology." In Arabic language learning, this limitation has an impact on the lack of use of media such as conversational audio (istima'), learning videos, and interactive platforms that can improve students' language skills. Interviews with school principals show that access to teacher training is very limited. In the context of Arabic, this has an impact on the lack of teacher competence in applying modern methods such as communicative approaches or direct methods in learning Arabic.

The results of the observation show the limitations of facilities such as the internet and learning media. In learning Arabic, this causes students to not get exposure to authentic Arabic, so their abilities are limited to texts and theory. Thus, this inequality not only impacts the quality of education in general, but also specifically hinders the development of communicative and contextual Arabic language competencies.

Table 2. Inequality of Access and Quality of Education between Regions

Informant Position	Interview Excerpts	Indicator
Teacher	"We are constrained by facilities and networks for digital learning."	Limitations of technology
Principal	"Access to teacher training is very limited in the regions."	Lack of teacher competency development
Teacher	"Learning still uses the usual methods due to limited facilities."	Less innovative learning

The table shows that education inequality occurs in a multidimensional manner, including aspects of infrastructure, human resources, and learning processes. In the context of Arabic language education, technological limitations not only hinder learning in general, but also limit students' access to authentic Arabic learning resources, such as audio istima' (listening), video conversations, and interactive learning platforms. Teachers highlight the limitations of technology as the main obstacle, while the principal emphasizes limited access to training as a factor that slows down the improvement of teacher competence, especially in implementing communicative Arabic learning methods such as al-madkhal al-ittishali. This shows that educational inequality is not only caused by one factor, but is the result of the accumulation of various interrelated limitations.

Limitations in the Implementation of Innovation and Education Reform

The limitations of the implementation of educational innovation and reform in this study are defined as the ineffectiveness of the implementation of education reform policies and programs, especially in technology-based learning and student-centered learning. In the context of Arabic language education, this limitation can be seen in the low application of innovative methods such as communication-based learning (al-madkhal al-ittishali), the use of Arabic digital media, and the integration of technology in the learning of maharah lughawiyah (language skills).

Based on interviews with teachers, it was stated that "We have not received enough training." In Arabic language learning, this has an impact on the teacher's lack of ability to develop active learning strategies such as role play (tamtsil ad-daura), discussion, and conversation practice. Interviews with school principals show that policies are often out of context. In the context of the Arabic language, this can be seen from the curriculum that demands innovation, but is not balanced with facilities such as language laboratories or access to Arabic-language digital media.

The results of the observation show that some teachers still use conventional methods. In learning Arabic, this is reflected in the use of the qawa'id wa tarjamah (grammar-translation method) method that emphasizes text analysis rather than active communication. The researcher interprets that resistance to change and limited resources are the main factors that hinder the innovation of Arabic language learning. In fact, learning Arabic in the modern era demands a more communicative, interactive, and technology-based approach.

Table 3. Limitations in the Implementation of Innovation and Education Reform

Informant Position	Interview Excerpts	Indicator
Teacher	"We haven't had enough training to implement innovative learning."	Lack of practical training
Principal	"The policy often doesn't match the conditions of our schools."	Non-contextual policy
Teacher	"Some teachers are still comfortable with the old methods."	Resistance to change

The table shows that the limitations of the implementation of educational innovation are influenced by three main factors, namely teacher capacity, policy relevance, and school organizational culture. In the context of Arabic language education, the capacity of teachers is not only related to general pedagogic abilities, but also competence in applying communicative language learning methods, such as *al-madkhal al-ittishali* (communicative approach) and the development of *maharah lughawiyah* (language skills). Teachers revealed the lack of training as the main obstacle, which had an impact on their low ability to integrate the practice of *hiwar* (conversation), *istima'* (listening), and the use of Arabic-language digital media in learning. Meanwhile, the principal highlighted the incompatibility of the policy with the conditions in the field, which in Arabic language learning is often seen from the demands of the curriculum that emphasizes communicative competence without the support of facilities such as language laboratories or access to authentic Arabic learning resources.

Indicators of resistance to change show that psychological and cultural factors have a significant role in inhibiting learning innovation, particularly in the context of Arabic language education. This is reflected in the tendency of teachers to continue to use traditional methods such as *qawa'id wa tarjamah* (grammar-translation method) which focuses on the analysis of rules, rather than the active and communicative use of language. This habit makes teachers reluctant to switch to more innovative approaches such as communicative or technology-based approaches, especially when they are not supported by adequate training. As a result, learning Arabic becomes less interactive and not optimal in developing students' communication skills. Furthermore, data patterns show a close relationship between policies, human resource capacity, and implementation in the field. When policies are not contextual and are not accompanied by training and facility support, innovations such as the use of digital media, project-based learning, and active communication practices are difficult to implement. These conditions form a cycle of barriers, in which limited training and facilities reinforce resistance to change, which ultimately hinders the success of Arabic language learning reforms. Therefore, without comprehensive interventions through adaptive policies, teacher competency improvement, and the provision of supporting facilities, Arabic learning innovations will be difficult to realize effectively and sustainably, thus having a direct impact on the low quality of students' communicative skills mastery in the era of globalization.

Discussion

The results of this study show that there is a gap between the competence of graduates and the needs of the world of work, which is in line with various literature that highlights the phenomenon of mismatch between educational output and

industry demands (Nasution et al., 2025; Rasmitadila et al., 2025; Riyadi, 2020; Udeogalanya, 2022). These findings are consistent with previous research that states that education systems that are still oriented to theory and memorization tend to produce graduates who lack practical skills and adaptive abilities (Nisak & Ishari, 2025). In the context of Arabic language education, this gap is seen in the dominance of mastery of qawa'id (nahwu and sharaf) compared to the development of communicative skills such as maharah al-kalam (speaking), maharah al-istima' (listening), and the ability to understand texts contextually. In modern education studies, the competency-based approach emphasizes the importance of integration between knowledge and skills, including in Arabic language learning, which ideally combines linguistic and communicative aspects, but in practice this has not been fully implemented in the field (Cunnington et al., 2023; Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025; Septiana et al., 2023). The differences that emerged in this study lie in the context of regions with limited resources, where the gap is not only caused by learning approaches, but also by structural factors such as language learning facilities (e.g. language laboratories) and minimal Arabic teacher training (Andriyanto & Widodo, 2025; Kirmadi et al., 2026; Rozi et al., 2025).

In addition, the findings on the inequality of access and quality of education between rural and urban areas also reinforce the results of previous research that highlights the existence of educational inequality as a global problem, especially in developing countries (Fitzgerald et al., 2025; D. Putri, 2025). In the context of Arabic language education, this inequality can be seen in the limited access to authentic Arabic learning resources, such as istima' audio media, learning videos, and interactive digital platforms that support the development of maharah lughawiyah. The literature shows that access to technology, teacher training, and infrastructure are the main determinants of quality of education. The results of this study are in line with this view, where the limited facilities and access to training have a direct impact on the low innovation of Arabic language learning, especially in the application of a communicative approach (al-madkhal al-ittishali) (Anton & Van Ryzin, 2024; Demartini et al., 2024; Duan & Zhao, 2025). However, this study provides additional emphasis that these inequalities are cyclical and mutually reinforcing, so that without appropriate policy interventions, the gap will continue to widen. Thus, these findings enrich the literature by showing how geographical factors and resource distribution affect the quality of learning Arabic systemically.

Furthermore, findings related to the limitations of the implementation of innovation and education reform show that there is a gap between policy and practice, which has also been widely discussed in the education policy literature. Many studies state that education policies are often top-down and lack contextual, making them difficult to implement effectively at the school level (Zickafoose et al., 2024). The results of this study support this view, especially with the resistance of teachers to change and the lack of applicable training (Adeoye & Baharun, 2025; Riatmaja et al., 2025). In Arabic language learning, this resistance can be seen in the tendency of teachers to continue using the qawa'id wa tarjamah method rather than a communicative or technology-based approach. However, this study also adds the perspective that the cultural factors of school organization and the readiness of individual teachers are important elements that are often overlooked in policy implementation. This shows that the success of Arabic language learning reform is not only determined by the quality of policies, but also by the readiness of implementing actors in the field (Faizin, 2024; Gonzales & Roberts, 2025; Rochmat et al., 2022; Sellami, 2025).

In terms of theoretical implications, this study strengthens the concept that the quality of education is the result of the interaction between structural, cultural, and pedagogical factors. These findings support the theory of education systems that see education as an interconnected ecosystem, including in Arabic language learning that requires synergy between curriculum, methods, teachers, and facilities (Najiah & Baharun, 2025; Shawyun et al., 2025; Sunarjo et al., 2024). In addition, this research also contributes to the development of education policy implementation theory by emphasizing the importance of contextual and participatory approaches in designing and implementing Arabic language learning innovations. Thus, this study not only confirms the existing theory, but also expands the understanding of the dynamics of education implementation, especially in the context of learning Arabic in areas with limited resources.

Practically, the results of this study have significant implications for policy makers, school managers, and teachers. First, curriculum reform is needed that places more emphasis on the development of students' practical skills and job readiness, including strengthening maharah al-kalam and maharah al-istima' in Arabic language learning. Second, the government needs to ensure equitable access to educational facilities, such as language laboratories and digital media, as well as continuous training of Arabic language teachers, especially in rural areas. Third, the implementation of education policies must be adjusted to local conditions to be more effective and sustainable, including in the development of contextual Arabic learning strategies. In addition, there is a need to make efforts to build an innovative culture in schools through continuous training and mentoring for teachers to be able to apply a communicative and technology-based approach in Arabic language learning. Thus, the results of this study provide strategic direction in efforts to improve the quality of education as a whole and reduce gaps, especially in the mastery of Arabic language that is relevant to global demands.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes that the main problems in education lie in the gap between the competence of graduates and the needs of the world of work, inequality of access to education, and the limited implementation of learning innovations, which overall shows the dominance of theoretical approaches over the development of practical skills. In the context of Arabic language education, this condition is reflected in the strong mastery of qawa'id (nahwu and sharaf) but the weakness of communicative skills such as maharah al-kalam and maharah al-istima', so that graduates are less prepared to face professional demands. The main lesson from this study is the importance of transforming learning towards a balanced approach between theory and practice, contextual, and competency-based. Scientifically, this research contributes by enriching the study of education through integrative analysis between structural, cultural, and pedagogical factors, as well as presenting the perspective of Arabic language education on global issues such as skills mismatch and educational inequality, and emphasizing the importance of a contextual and participatory policy approach. However, this study has limitations in the limited scope of the location, the use of a qualitative approach that has not quantitatively measured the relationship between variables, and has not accommodated the students' perspective in depth, especially in the evaluation of the effectiveness of Arabic language learning methods. Therefore, further research is suggested to expand the study area, use a mixed methods approach, and examine

more specifically communicative and technology-based Arabic language learning models to improve students' maharah lughawiyah more effectively and sustainably.

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