



***Adab* as an Operational Pedagogical Principle: Intercultural Alignment in Arabic Language Teaching at a Tahfīz Pesantren in West Java, Indonesia**

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Abstract

Adab, the Islamic ethical orientation governing the conduct of knowledge, functions as an operational pedagogical principle shaping Arabic language teaching in a *tahfīz pesantren* in West Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at a purposively selected institution in which Qur'anic memorization constitutes the primary educational commitment. Participants included one institutional leader, two Arabic language teachers, and fourteen students distributed across junior and senior learning groups. Data were generated through 12 structured classroom observation sessions, semi-structured individual interviews, and institutional document analysis; thematic analysis, following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure, yielded three analytical themes mapped directly to the three research questions. The findings demonstrate that *Adab* is not merely a background value but is explicitly invoked as a principle governing real-time instructional decisions, including lesson scope, pacing calibration, and the management of cognitive demands relative to students' memorization responsibilities. At the junior level, *Adab*-oriented restraint manifests through visual scaffolding, *tikrār* (repetition-based memorization practice), and intensive teacher mediation; at the senior level, it shapes the integration of classical grammatical traditions with analytical textual interpretation. Framed through intercultural education theory (Bennett, 1993, 2017; Byram, 1997, 2021; Holliday, 2011; Kramsch, 1993, 2021), these instructional adaptations are theorized as intercultural pedagogical alignment — teachers' principled, culturally informed negotiation between communicative language pedagogies and the institution's memorization-centered learning culture. Three specific contributions are advanced: (1) an empirical account of *Adab* as documentable classroom-level practice rather than abstract norm; (2)

the concept of intercultural pedagogical alignment as a new analytical category for value-oriented educational settings; and (3) a reinterpretation of the absence of Arabic immersion environments as a cognitively rational, ethically grounded institutional choice.

Keywords: Adab; Arabic language teaching; cognitive load management; intercultural pedagogical alignment; tahfiz pesantren; teacher agency

1. Introduction

Arabic language education occupies a distinctive position within Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Unlike other foreign languages taught in formal schooling, Arabic simultaneously functions as the medium of Islamic religious practice, the key for accessing the classical scholarly tradition (*turāth*), and a durable marker of Islamic intellectual and spiritual identity (Lukens-Bull, 2001; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022; Sabiq, 2022). This multifunctionality is deeply embedded in *pesantren* educational cultures, where Arabic learning is understood not as a discrete linguistic competence but as an integral dimension of students' broader religious and moral formation (Ghufron & Anwar, 2020; Muntaha et al., 2025). The *pesantren* itself occupies a particular structural position in Indonesian Islamic education (Encung & Rusydi, 2026; Taufikin, 2021): simultaneously functioning as a religious boarding school, a cultural institution, and a community educational center. Anchoring the *pesantren*'s Arabic learning tradition is the practice of *kitab kuning* — the reading and exegesis of classical Arabic-script texts — which continues to inform grammatical instruction across learning levels (van Bruinessen, 1990).

In recent decades, Arabic language pedagogy in Indonesia has increasingly engaged with global educational trends emphasizing communicative competence, functional literacy, and learner autonomy, prompting many institutions to adopt internationally oriented Arabic teaching materials (Ritonga et al., 2021; Supardi et al., 2024; Yuwana et al., 2024). However, the transfer of such pedagogical approaches into *pesantren* settings is consistently and demonstrably not straightforward. Local educational priorities, institutional values, and inherited learning cultures mediate how external instructional frameworks are received, adapted, or selectively resisted (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022; Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). Research on multicultural education in Indonesian Islamic schools has documented how institutional leadership plays a crucial role in shaping culturally responsive pedagogical environments (Mahmud, 2023), yet specific empirical attention to value-governed instructional alignment in Arabic language teaching — at the classroom rather than program level — remains substantially limited.

Intercultural education theory offers a productive analytical lens for understanding these negotiations. Bennett's (1993, 2017) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity conceptualizes intercultural competence as a progressive capacity to recognize and adapt to culturally different frames of reference. Byram's (1997, 2021) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence foregrounds critical cultural awareness — the ability to evaluate practices and perspectives across cultural frames. Kramsch (1993, 2021) establishes that language pedagogy is never culturally neutral but is embedded in specific assumptions about knowledge, authority, and meaning-making. Critically, Holliday (2011) argues that intercultural practices are ideologically situated: shaped by power relations and institutional conditions that universalist models tend to elide. This paper employs the concept of intercultural pedagogical alignment — defined as teachers' principled, culturally informed negotiation of instructional practice across

different cultural logics of language learning — to characterize the instructional processes documented in this study. It is analytically distinct from general pedagogical adaptation in that it is explicitly grounded in value-based educational reasoning rather than instructional efficiency alone.

These dynamics are particularly salient in *pesantren* that prioritize intensive Qur'anic memorization (*tahfiz*). In such institutions, students devote substantial daily time and cognitive energy to memorizing, consolidating, and revising large portions of the Qur'an. This commitment demands sustained concentration, disciplined memory routines, and careful management of cognitive resources (Ainissyifa, 2024; Sweller, 2023). Consequently, Arabic language learning is typically positioned as a supporting rather than primary educational goal, requiring careful calibration to avoid cognitive interference with memorization activities (Muis et al., 2024; Saragih et al., 2021).

Central to this calibration is the concept of *Adab*. In Islamic educational traditions, *Adab* encompasses not merely polite conduct but a comprehensive ethical orientation governing the pursuit, transmission, and appropriate prioritization of knowledge (Al-Attas, 1980; al-Zarnūjī, trans. 2003; Ghufroon & Anwar, 2020). In *pesantren* contexts, *Adab* functions as a practical guide to daily educational decision-making: shaping how subjects are sequenced, how instructional intensity is regulated, and how teacher authority is exercised (Baharun et al., 2025; Muntaha et al., 2025; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). Despite its recognized importance, empirical research documenting how *Adab* shapes concrete classroom practices in Arabic language teaching remains scarce.

Previous research on Arabic learning in *pesantren* has largely focused on program-level features, including immersion environments (*bi'ah lughawiyyah*), the selection of teaching materials, and learner motivation (Ritonga et al., 2021; Sabiq, 2022; Yoyo et al., 2023). To our knowledge, empirical studies documenting how *Adab* — as a specific Islamic ethical orientation — translates into observable, moment-by-moment classroom instructional decisions in Arabic language teaching remain limited.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining Arabic language teaching practices in a *tahfiz pesantren* in West Java, Indonesia, through a qualitative case study approach. Three specific contributions are pursued: (1) an empirical account of *Adab* as documentable classroom practice rather than abstract institutional norm; (2) the concept of intercultural pedagogical alignment as a new analytical category applicable to value-oriented educational settings; and (3) a reinterpretation of the absence of Arabic immersion environments as a cognitively rational and ethically grounded institutional choice. The study is guided by three research questions:

RQ1: How do Arabic language teachers prioritize and structure instruction within the institutional context of a tahfiz pesantren?

RQ2: What teaching strategies are employed at junior and senior learning levels to manage cognitive demands while aligning with institutional values?

RQ3: In what ways does Adab function as an operational pedagogical principle, and how does this reflect a process of intercultural pedagogical alignment?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Adab in Islamic Educational Practice: From Norm to Operational Principle

In Islamic educational traditions, *Adab* is a richly layered concept extending well beyond surface-level etiquette or behavioral decorum. Al-Attas (1980, p. 22) defines *Adab* as the

disciplining of the mind, soul, and body to recognize and acknowledge the proper place of all things in the order of creation — a definition that positions *Adab* as foundational to the epistemological orientation of Islamic learning. This understanding is rooted in a deep classical tradition: al-Zarnūjī's thirteenth-century pedagogical treatise *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* devotes substantial attention to the ethical conditions necessary for valid and beneficial knowledge acquisition (al-Zarnūjī, trans. 2003). In educational practice, this orientation translates into a set of relational and procedural norms governing how knowledge is sought, who may transmit it, and under what conditions it is appropriately received (Ghufron & Anwar, 2020; Tisdell, 2003).

In *pesantren* contexts, *Adab* functions as a practical guide to daily educational decision-making rather than merely as an abstract moral ideal. Teachers draw on *Adab* to determine appropriate levels of teaching intensity, manage classroom interactions, and regulate expectations for student engagement (Baharun et al., 2025; Muntaha et al., 2025). Crucially, *Adab* implies a hierarchical yet relational authority structure: teachers bear responsibility not only for the transmission of knowledge but also for protecting students' spiritual and cognitive well-being — including ensuring that instructional demands do not compromise students' primary religious commitments (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). The present study addresses a gap in the literature by treating *Adab* as an empirically documentable pedagogical principle, subject to rigorous analysis through classroom observation and interview data.

2.2 Arabic Language Teaching in *Tahfiz Pesantren*: Constraints and Negotiations

Arabic language teaching in *pesantren* has traditionally served the goal of enabling students to read, interpret, and engage with classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) — a tradition with deep historical roots in the Indonesian archipelago (van Bruinessen, 1990). In contemporary settings, this tradition increasingly intersects with communicative language pedagogies emphasizing functional use, learner autonomy, and integrated skills development (Lukens-Bull, 2001; Ritonga et al., 2021). The resulting tension requires *pesantren* educators to negotiate between inherited instructional traditions and external pedagogical expectations — a process that Supardi et al. (2024) characterize as the alignment of curriculum ideology with institutional religious values.

In *tahfiz pesantren*, this negotiation is further complicated by the centrality of Qur'anic memorization. Research documents that intensive memorization imposes substantial extrinsic cognitive load, reducing available mental capacity for additional learning tasks (Ainissyifa, 2024; Sweller, 2023). Consequently, Arabic language teaching is treated as a supporting subject, with scope and intensity carefully calibrated to minimize interference with memorization routines (Ghufron & Anwar, 2020; Muis et al., 2024). Zikriah and Mauludiyah's (2024) systematic bibliometric review confirms that classroom-level studies in *tahfiz*-oriented contexts — particularly those examining how teachers navigate cognitive and ethical constraints simultaneously — are underrepresented.

2.3 Intercultural Dimensions of Language Education in Religious Contexts

Intercultural education scholarship has established that language classrooms are not culturally neutral spaces: they are sites where learners' existing cultural frameworks encounter pedagogical frameworks embedded in different cultural assumptions (Kramsch, 1993, 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Bennett's (1993, 2017) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity proposes that intercultural competence develops through progressive recognition of cultural difference, ultimately enabling individuals to evaluate and adapt across cultural frames in an

ethnorelative manner. Byram's (1997, 2021) model extends this by emphasizing critical cultural awareness as a core pedagogical capacity. Deardorff (2020) argues further that intercultural competence must be understood as institutionally embedded rather than purely individual.

A critical contribution is offered by Holliday (2011), whose critique of universalist models of intercultural competence argues that intercultural practices are ideologically situated. Applied to religious educational contexts, Holliday's framework illuminates why teachers in strongly value-oriented institutions engage in what may appear, from an external perspective, to be a selective refusal of communicative pedagogical models — but which, from an insider perspective, constitutes a principled, institutionally coherent, and ideologically informed pedagogical stance. In the *tahfīz pesantren* context, how teachers navigate this interface constitutes what this study terms intercultural pedagogical alignment. Beyond intercultural negotiation, instructional practices in *tahfīz* contexts are also shaped by students' cognitive demands and teachers' adaptive responses to them. This dimension can be further understood through cognitive load theory and perspectives on teacher agency.

2.4 Cognitive Load Management and Teacher Agency in High-Demand Learning Environments

Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 2023) provides a complementary analytical lens for understanding instructional decision-making in *tahfīz pesantren*. The theory distinguishes between intrinsic load (the inherent complexity of learning material), extraneous load (demands imposed by instructional design), and germane load (cognitive effort directed toward schema formation). In environments where learners carry substantial cognitive burdens from intensive memorization activities, effective teaching requires deliberate management of extraneous load through pacing, scaffolding, and selective emphasis on essential material (Gkintoni et al., 2025; Muis et al., 2024).

Research on teacher agency in constrained educational contexts emphasizes that teachers are not passive curriculum implementers but active decision-makers who continuously adapt instruction to align with learners' cognitive readiness and contextual demands (Priestley et al., 2015; Maxwell, 2013). Priestley et al. (2015) develop an ecological understanding of teacher agency — one that situates teachers' agentic capacities within the cultural, institutional, and material conditions of their practice. The intersection of cognitive management and ethical orientation — operationalized through *Adab* — is precisely what this study seeks to document empirically.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand instructional practices, teacher decision-making, and the operation of ethical principles in classroom settings — phenomena requiring interpretive, contextually grounded analysis rather than measurement or experimental manipulation. Specifically, the design followed the logic of an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; Creswell & Poth, 2018): the *tahfīz pesantren* under investigation was selected not as an end in itself but as a site for examining and theorizing the relationship between *Adab* and instructional practice. The case was bounded by institution, subject domain (Arabic language teaching), and the 2024 academic year (Yin, 2018).

3.2 Research Site and Participant Selection

The research site was a *tahfiz pesantren* in West Java, Indonesia, selected purposively on the basis of two explicit criteria: (1) Qur'anic memorization must constitute the institution's primary educational program, and (2) formal Arabic language teaching must be delivered as a distinct curricular subject alongside memorization activities (Patton, 2015). The final participant configuration comprised one institutional leader, two Arabic language teachers (Teacher A: junior classes; Teacher B: senior classes), and fourteen students (seven junior, seven senior). This configuration enabled within-case comparisons across institutional roles and learning levels.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were generated using three complementary instruments, ensuring triangulation of sources and methods (Cohen et al., 2017; Denzin, 2012; Miles et al., 2014). Classroom observations were conducted across six sessions per class level (twelve sessions total, each averaging 80 minutes), using a purpose-built structured observation protocol targeting five focal dimensions: (a) instructional strategies deployed; (b) patterns of teacher–student interaction; (c) lesson pacing and scope calibration; (d) observable invocations of *Adab*-related reasoning; and (e) evidence of cognitive demand management strategies.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with both Arabic language teachers and the institutional leader (45–60 minutes each, audio-recorded with written informed consent). Interview protocols were developed in explicit alignment with the research questions, incorporating probes targeting instructional decision-making rationale, the role of *Adab* in daily teaching practice, and responses to cognitive constraints imposed by the memorization program (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and returned to participants for member checking prior to analysis. Document analysis was conducted on institutional materials including the weekly learning schedule, internal Arabic teaching guidelines, and the *pesantren*'s published educational philosophy statement (Bowen, 2009).

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis procedure, operationalized through the analytical framework of Miles et al. (2014). Three analytical themes emerged in direct alignment with the three research questions: (1) *Adab*-governed instructional prioritization and institutional hierarchy (RQ1); (2) level-differentiated cognitive scaffolding strategies (RQ2); and (3) *Adab* as an operational pedagogical principle and intercultural pedagogical alignment (RQ3). To enhance analytical rigor, negative case analysis was conducted throughout — systematically seeking evidence that would challenge, qualify, or complicate emerging interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013).

3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed systematically across Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four criteria. Credibility was established through source triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement across twelve observed sessions and approximately six months of fieldwork. Transferability was supported through thick description of the institutional context, participant characteristics, and the analytical procedure. Dependability was maintained through the consistent application of the structured observation protocol and systematic documentation of all analytical

decisions. Confirmability was addressed through team peer review of all analytical interpretations prior to finalization.

3.6 Researcher Positionality

The lead researcher is an Arabic language educator affiliated with a national university in Indonesia and has prior research experience in Islamic educational settings. This insider positioning facilitated institutional access and participant rapport but also introduced interpretive predispositions. To manage this reflexivity, the research team maintained systematic reflective journals throughout the data collection phase; co-investigators with expertise in curriculum studies and qualitative methodology provided structured critical analytical distance (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

All participants provided written informed consent prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary; participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. All participant identities are anonymized in the reporting of findings, and the research site is not identified by name. Institutional permission was formally secured before fieldwork commenced.

4. Results

Findings are presented in direct alignment with the three research questions. Section 4.1 addresses how Arabic instruction is prioritized and structured within the institutional context (RQ1). Section 4.2 documents the teaching strategies employed at junior and senior learning levels to manage cognitive demands (RQ2). Section 4.3 examines how *Adab* functions as an operational pedagogical principle and reflects intercultural pedagogical alignment (RQ3). Throughout, participant contributions are identified by institutional role to maintain traceability while preserving anonymity.

4.1 Institutional Prioritization and *Adab*-Governed Instructional Structure (RQ1)

The first and most structurally significant finding concerns the institutional hierarchy that governs all Arabic language teaching at the research site, and the central role of *Adab* in constituting and legitimizing that hierarchy. Classroom observations and interview data converge consistently in indicating that Qur'anic memorization occupies an uncontested primary position within the institution's educational program, with Arabic language learning explicitly and formally positioned as subordinate and supplementary to memorization. Critically, this subordination is actively and explicitly legitimized through *Adab* — the ethical framework governing how knowledge is prioritized and how teaching obligations are understood and practiced.

The institutional leader articulated this *Adab*-based governing principle with particular clarity:

"Our approach to Arabic is inseparable from Adab. We do not teach Arabic merely as a language subject — students learn Arabic as a way of approaching knowledge with proper reverence. The intensity of instruction must respect the primary purpose of this institution, which is the memorization of the Qur'an. If Arabic lessons become burdensome, we have violated the spirit of Adab in learning." (Institutional leader interview)

Teacher A's account elaborated on how this principle is translated into concrete daily instructional decisions:

"Arabic is treated as a supporting subject here. Our main concern is to protect students' focus on memorization, so we deliberately keep Arabic lessons manageable. When I plan a lesson, I always ask myself first: will this disturb the students' memorization? If yes, I reduce the scope. That is what Adab requires of us as teachers." (Teacher A interview)

Classroom observation data corroborate both accounts. Observed lessons showed that teachers consistently operated within what might be characterized as self-imposed instructional ceilings: they deliberately refrained from introducing new material when student attention or energy appeared depleted following memorization sessions, and actively moderated the volume and complexity of linguistic content. This pattern of deliberate instructional moderation is fully consistent with cognitive load theory's prescription for extraneous load reduction in high-demand learning environments (Gkintoni et al., 2025; Sweller, 2023); crucially, however, its rationale at the research site is explicitly ethical — grounded in *Adab* — rather than purely technical or pedagogically instrumental.

The *pesantren* does not implement a comprehensive Arabic immersion environment (*bi'ah lughawiyyah*). Institutional documentation confirms that Arabic use is restricted to formal classroom periods; spontaneous Arabic production outside lesson time is neither required nor expected. Teachers consistently described this policy as a deliberate form of cognitive risk management, and consistently grounded it in *Adab*-governed prioritization of the institution's primary commitment.

4.2 Level-Differentiated Cognitive Scaffolding: Junior and Senior Classes (RQ2)

4.2.1 Junior Classes

Classroom observations in junior Arabic classes reveal a coherent, systematically applied instructional configuration aimed at reducing epistemological and linguistic barriers for students with limited prior exposure to Arabic. Teacher A's instructional responses are analytically best characterized as *Adab*-governed scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976; Vygotsky, 1978): the deliberate construction of cognitive and linguistic foundations through graduated support, without imposing demands that could undermine students' primary memorization responsibilities. Three interconnected instructional components constitute this scaffolding configuration: visual scaffolding, *tikrār* (repetition-based memorization practice), and adaptive teacher-led mediation of unvocalized text.

The dominant strategy is visual scaffolding integrated with structured entry into Arabic text. In every observed junior session, Teacher A deployed pictorial materials as initial entry points for meaning-making. Teacher A articulated the pedagogical rationale explicitly:

"Most beginners cannot rely on text alone. Pictures help them understand the situation first before dealing with Arabic words. I always make sure the meaning is clear in their minds before they try to read or repeat. If they are confused, their memorization will also suffer — so we must build understanding step by step." (Teacher A interview)

Tikrār constitutes the second major instructional component. Observational data show a consistent, predictable pedagogical cycle in every junior session: Teacher A models target pronunciation and meaning; the full class repeats chorally; the teacher assesses comprehension

before progressing to new material. Importantly, *tikrār* in this context carries additional cultural resonance: it directly parallels the repetition-based routines through which students engage in Qur'anic memorization, embedding Arabic language learning within a familiar and institutionally valued practice. The third component — adaptive teacher-led mediation of unvocalized text — was sustained throughout each session and applied responsively to students' observable cognitive state.

Despite these supports, variation in students' learning progress was observed across junior sessions. Some learners demonstrated difficulty retaining new vocabulary and recognizing recurring sentence patterns, particularly when instructional support was gradually reduced. In such cases, Teacher A responded by slowing the pace of lessons and increasing repetition cycles — illustrating an adaptive approach to instruction grounded in continuous, real-time assessment of students' cognitive readiness. This responsiveness was explicitly framed by Teacher A as an *Adab*-governed obligation: neither to advance material prematurely nor to allow confusion to persist. Such adaptive strategies have been documented in research on teacher agency in constrained learning environments, where instructional flexibility is essential for maintaining learning continuity without compromising students' primary commitments (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Rohani et al., 2026).

4.2.2 Senior Classes

Teaching practices in senior Arabic classes differ substantially from those observed at the junior level, reflecting students' more developed Arabic linguistic base and the different way in which *Adab* governs instruction at this level. Most senior students have extensive daily contact with Arabic through their intensive memorization program, providing a substantive lexical, phrasal, and syntactic foundation. Teacher B's instructional approach capitalizes systematically on this foundation in a manner that itself reflects *Adab* as an operational principle.

Teacher B described the fundamental shift in instructional orientation at the senior level:

"With senior students, we rarely start from scratch. Many expressions are already familiar to them through memorization, so explanation becomes easier. I connect every new text to what they have already memorized. That is the advantage of tahfīz students — their Arabic is not empty; it has a foundation." (Teacher B interview)

When asked specifically about the role of *Adab* in shaping senior-level instruction, Teacher B elaborated:

"At the senior level, Adab means teaching with wisdom. I do not push students to produce language they are not ready for. Adab also means respecting the knowledge tradition — so when I teach grammar, I use classical categories that students recognize from their religious texts. That connection is itself a form of Adab." (Teacher B interview)

Grammatical explanation (*tarkīb*) constitutes the central instructional activity in senior classes. Observational data show Teacher B systematically analyzing sentence structures, guiding students through morphological relationships and syntactic functions before inviting textual interpretation. This process consistently draws on grammatical categories from classical Arabic grammar texts — the *kitab kuning* tradition described by van Bruinessen (1990) as foundational to *pesantren* Arabic learning. Such instructional integration reflects a pedagogical approach that values analytical rigor while maintaining continuity with established learning traditions, a pattern

documented in studies on Arabic grammar instruction in *pesantren* contexts (Baharun et al., 2025; Ellis, 2009; Ritonga et al., 2021). Compared to junior classes, teacher intervention at the senior level is more analytical than directive: teachers provide clarification when necessary but extend to students greater responsibility in interpreting texts and identifying grammatical patterns — a gradual release of interpretive responsibility consistent with advanced language instruction research (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). A significant pedagogical limitation observed at the senior level is the limited opportunity for spontaneous oral production, which Teacher B acknowledges as suboptimal from a communicative competence standpoint but considers institutionally necessary given the primacy of the memorization program (Rohani et al., 2026; Sweller, 2023).

Table 1 provides a comparative overview of Arabic teaching practices across learning levels at the research site, synthesizing the analytical findings reported in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.

Table 1: Overview of Arabic Teaching Practices Across Learning Levels

Aspect	Junior Classes	Senior Classes
Primary instructional focus	Initial comprehension and basic Arabic literacy	Textual interpretation and grammatical understanding
Main teaching strategies	Visual scaffolding, <i>tikrār</i> (repetition), teacher-led text mediation	Prior knowledge activation, <i>tarkīb</i> (grammatical analysis), gradual release of responsibility
Role of memorization in instruction	Not explicitly utilized; protected from instructional interference	Actively drawn upon as lexical and syntactic foundation for new text engagement
Main learning challenges	Unvocalized text decoding; vocabulary retention under cognitive load	Limited opportunities for spontaneous oral production; restricted immersion environment
Level of teacher intervention	High: intensive guidance, mediation, and pacing adaptation	Analytical: explanatory mediation with progressively greater learner responsibility
<i>Adab</i> expression	Protective restraint: reducing cognitive burden and preventing instructional overload	Epistemic respect: honoring knowledge tradition through classical grammatical categories

4.3 *Adab* as an Operational Pedagogical Principle and Intercultural Pedagogical Alignment (RQ3)

Across both learning levels, *Adab* functions not as a background institutional norm but as an explicitly invoked, real-time pedagogical decision criterion. The institutional leader's articulation — that Arabic instruction must respect the institution's primary purpose and that imposing excessive demands would violate the spirit of *Adab* — captures the governing logic operationalized in every observed teaching session. Both Teacher A and Teacher B consistently referenced *Adab* when explaining their choices to limit lesson scope, modulate pacing, withhold new material from cognitively depleted students, and decline to implement a comprehensive Arabic immersion environment. *Adab* thus constitutes what may be termed teacher ethical agency, shaped collectively through institutional values and responsibilities: a professional norm constituted by shared values, relational responsibilities, and institutional structures rather than by individual conscience alone.

Observation data across both classroom levels further confirmed this pattern. Teachers explicitly invoked *Adab* when explaining decisions related to pacing, instructional scope, and the selective limitation of immersion practices. These instructional patterns, taken together, constitute intercultural pedagogical alignment — defined as teachers' principled, culturally informed negotiation between communicative Arabic pedagogical frameworks and the institution's memorization-centered learning culture. The alignment is intercultural in the precise sense identified by Holliday (2011): it is ideologically situated, institutionally coherent, and grounded in ethical reasoning rather than instructional expediency. Teachers do not uncritically adopt communicative language pedagogies nor simply reject them; they engage both frames from an explicitly ethnorelative stance (Bennett, 1993, 2017), critically evaluating external pedagogical assumptions against institutional values (Byram, 1997, 2021) and making principled instructional choices that honor both the cognitive realities of their students and the ethical architecture of the institution. The documentation of this alignment process — at the level of observable, moment-by-moment classroom decisions — constitutes the central empirical contribution of this study to the literature on Arabic language education in Islamic institutional contexts.

5. Discussion

5.1 *Adab* as an Operational Pedagogical Principle: Moving Beyond Normative Accounts

The most fundamental contribution of this study is its empirical demonstration that *Adab* does not merely orient Islamic education at a normative or philosophical level — it actively and explicitly governs specific, real-time instructional decisions. This finding advances the existing literature in a targeted and important direction. Ghufroon & Anwar's (2020) influential work discusses *Adab* primarily in relation to institutional-curriculum positioning without examining its direct expression in classroom instructional practice. Al-Attas (1980) and al-Zarnūjī (trans. 2003) articulate the ethical dimensions of educational decision-making at a philosophical level of abstraction that the present study now empirically concretizes. Existing studies have paid limited attention to how *Adab* operates as an explicit criterion guiding classroom instructional decisions, particularly in relation to how specific teaching choices — such as reducing lesson scope, withholding new material, or declining to implement immersion — are justified and enacted by classroom teachers.

The *Adab* framework, as it operates here, constitutes what might be termed teacher ethical agency shaped collectively through institutional values and responsibilities — a form of professional practice that extends beyond individual conscience and is constituted through institutional structures and relational responsibilities. It also contributes to the literature on teacher agency in constrained institutional contexts (Priestley et al., 2015): *Adab* does not constrain teacher agency in these settings; rather, it functions as a constitutive cultural resource that shapes what it means to be a teacher within this institution.

5.2 Intercultural Pedagogical Alignment: A New Analytical Category

The second theoretical contribution concerns the characterization of teachers' instructional negotiations as intercultural pedagogical alignment. Intercultural pedagogical alignment, as documented in this study, involves at least three distinct operations simultaneously. First, teachers engage in a comparative cultural evaluation: they assess the cultural assumptions embedded in communicative Arabic pedagogical materials and compare them against the cultural logic of their

own institution — precisely the critical cultural awareness that Byram (1997, 2021) identifies as a central intercultural competence. Second, teachers adopt what Bennett (1993, 2017) characterizes as an ethnorelative stance: rather than dismissing external materials or uncritically adopting them, they engage with both frames from a position that acknowledges cultural difference and responds to it deliberately. Third — and this is where Holliday's (2011) critique of universalist interculturalism becomes particularly valuable — teachers engage in ideologically situated practice: their selective resistance to the adoption of full communicative pedagogy is a principled, institutionally coherent, and ethically justified pedagogical stance.

5.3 Rethinking the Immersion Imperative in Constrained Learning Contexts

The absence of a comprehensive Arabic immersion environment (*bi'ah lughawiyyah*) at the research site may initially appear to constitute a significant pedagogical limitation for communicative language teaching. The findings of this study challenge that interpretation decisively on two convergent grounds. First, on the cognitive argument: cognitive load theory explicitly recognizes that reducing extraneous cognitive demand can be pedagogically rational — indeed, pedagogically necessary — in environments where intrinsic load is already high (Gkintoni et al., 2025; Plass et al., 2010; Sweller, 2023). In an institution where students devote substantial daily energy to the demanding cognitive activity of Qur'anic memorization, the addition of a continuous Arabic-language production requirement would constitute a significant extraneous load. Second, on the ethical argument: the non-implementation is explicitly and consistently justified by participants through *Adab* — as a principled institutional decision to protect students' primary religious commitment from unnecessary additional cognitive demand.

The instructional scaffolding strategies deployed within this constrained environment further challenge simplified deficit interpretations. At the junior level, multimodal scaffolding — particularly the strategic use of visual aids as pre-textual meaning-making supports — functions precisely as multimodal learning research predicts: enabling initial comprehension in the absence of productive language opportunities (Abdul Hakim, 2019; Ahmadi & Ilmiani, 2020; Bateman, 2014; Chang & Tsai, 2022; Hadiananto et al., 2021; Mayer, 2020). At the senior level, activating students' existing Qur'anic Arabic knowledge as a bridge to new textual material represents a cognitively sophisticated application of prior-knowledge activation — reducing intrinsic load while sustaining analytical depth (Gkintoni et al., 2025; Mayer, 2020). Taken together, these strategies demonstrate that effective Arabic language teaching in *tahfiz* contexts does not require maximal exposure to the language; it requires strategically calibrated, cognitively respectful, and ethically grounded instructional design.

Across all three analytical themes, the findings consistently highlight the central role of teacher agency in mediating between institutional values, cognitive constraints, and instructional possibilities. Both teachers in this study demonstrate sophisticated and continuously exercised adaptive decision-making: they assess students' cognitive states across sessions, adjust pacing and scope accordingly, selectively appropriate external pedagogical resources, and explicitly invoke *Adab* as both a justificatory and a generative framework for these choices. This finding aligns closely with Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency. Teacher preparation programs for Arabic educators in Islamic institutional contexts should therefore develop not only technical pedagogical competencies but also the reflexive capacity to navigate intercultural pedagogical alignment as a core professional skill.

The novelty of this study lies in three specific contributions. First, it provides one of the earliest empirical accounts of *Adab* as a classroom-level operational principle, moving beyond philosophical discussions (Al-Attas, 1980; al-Zarnūjī, trans. 2003) to demonstrate how *Adab* is operationalized through observable, moment-by-moment instructional decisions. Second, it introduces intercultural pedagogical alignment as a new analytical category for value-oriented educational settings, conceptually distinct from general pedagogical adaptation. Third, it reframes the absence of Arabic immersion as a principled, cognitively rational, and ethically justified institutional choice rather than a pedagogical deficit — an interpretation with important implications for evaluating educational effectiveness in high-demand religious learning contexts.

The present study has two key limitations that bound the scope of its findings. First, the single-site qualitative design restricts generalizability; the patterns documented here are specific to the research site and cannot be assumed to hold across all *tahfīz* institutions. Second, the absence of student voice is a significant gap: learners' own experiences of *Adab*-governed instruction remain unexamined, and their perspectives may differ substantially from those of teachers and institutional leaders. Future research should integrate learner voice through student interviews and multi-site comparative studies to extend and test the robustness of intercultural pedagogical alignment as an analytical concept.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how *Adab* functions as an operational pedagogical principle in Arabic language teaching within a *tahfīz pesantren* in West Java, Indonesia, and how teachers' instructional practices reflect intercultural pedagogical alignment. The findings demonstrate that *Adab* operates not merely as an institutional value but as an explicitly invoked principle that guides instructional decisions on lesson scope, pacing, cognitive demand management, and pedagogical prioritization. Teachers' practices reflected intercultural pedagogical alignment through their context-sensitive negotiation between communicative pedagogies and the institution's memorization-centered culture. More broadly, the findings suggest that value-oriented educational settings require pedagogical approaches that are ethically grounded, cognitively responsive, and institutionally coherent. This study contributes an empirically grounded account of classroom practice in an underrepresented educational context and introduces intercultural pedagogical alignment as a useful analytical lens. However, the findings remain limited by the single-site design and the absence of student perspectives. Future research should incorporate learner voices and comparative multi-site designs to further examine the applicability of intercultural pedagogical alignment across diverse *tahfīz* settings.

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