

Pedagogical Practices Supporting Arabic Communicative Competence in Malaysian Religious Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Arabic communication is a central outcome of language learning, yet many students in Malaysian religious secondary schools experience difficulty using Arabic confidently and meaningfully. This study investigated pedagogical practices that support Arabic communicative competence in religious secondary schools in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. A qualitative case-study design was employed involving 12 teachers of *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'asirah* (Arabic subject in religious school) from three schools. Participants were selected purposively based on their qualifications and teaching experience. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically through familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Trustworthiness was strengthened through expert validation, participant confirmation, an audit trail, and triangulation. Four themes emerged: communicative approaches, teaching strategies, teacher professionalism, and implementation challenges. Effective practices included interaction-based activities, explicit emphasis on speaking, strategic use of Arabic and Malay, technology integration, varied instructional methods, student-centred learning, and purposeful teaching materials. Teachers' Arabic proficiency, pedagogical competence, lesson planning, and professional disposition also shaped the quality of instruction. However, inadequate infrastructure, limited Arabic-speaking environments, and students' restricted vocabulary, confidence, and motivation constrained implementation. The findings show that communicative competence is supported not by a single technique but by alignment among meaningful interaction, comprehensible input, structured participation, adaptive scaffolding, teacher expertise, and enabling school conditions. Arabic instruction should therefore provide sustained opportunities for purposeful speaking, progressively increase comprehensible Arabic use, integrate digital and non-digital resources, and differentiate support according to learner readiness. Institutional support remains essential for sustaining communicative practice beyond individual teacher effort across classrooms and school settings.

Keywords: Arabic Communication, Communicative Language Teaching, Teaching Strategies, Teacher Professionalism, Religious Secondary Schools, Qualitative Case Study

Introduction

Arabic occupies a distinctive position in Malaysian education because it functions as a language of Islamic knowledge, religious practice, formal study, and communication. Its instruction extends from early schooling to higher education, including religious schools that implement specialised curricula (Fahrurrozi, 2021; Riffin & Taat, 2020). However, prolonged exposure to formal Arabic lessons does not necessarily produce confident or spontaneous oral communication. Malaysian learners continue to experience restricted vocabulary, anxiety about errors, low confidence, and limited opportunities to use Arabic beyond controlled classroom exercises (Hannani & Bakar, 2019; Riffin & Taat, 2020; Rizan & Baharudin, 2021). The central educational problem is therefore not merely access to Arabic instruction, but the conversion of linguistic knowledge into functional communication.

Arabic communicative competence extends beyond the reproduction of grammatical forms. Learners must understand interlocutors, retrieve appropriate vocabulary, organise meaning, and respond with sufficient accuracy, confidence, and fluency (Alqahtani, 2015; Maromar et al., 2018). In a non-Arabic-speaking context, classroom instruction is especially influential because it may provide students' principal exposure to spoken Arabic. Lessons dominated by explanation, translation, written exercises, or examination preparation can develop declarative knowledge without providing sufficient oral practice (Ali et al., 2018; Zaini et al., 2019). By contrast, frequent and supported interaction enables learners to practise language as communication rather than encounter it only as curriculum content (Kamaruddin et al., 2025; Radzi et al., 2021).

Teaching is a particularly important analytical domain because pedagogical decisions directly shape who speaks, how frequently students speak, what linguistic support they receive, and whether communication is meaningful or merely reproductive. Previous research associates Arabic speaking development with interactive activities, role-play, varied resources, communicative tasks, supportive language environments, and teachers' pedagogical competence (Abdulhafid et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2011; Ismail et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these practices operate within constraints such as uneven learner readiness, limited facilities, and weak continuity of Arabic use outside lessons (Ghani et al., 2018; Rushdi & Asbulah, 2023; Zaini et al., 2019). Examining teachers' accounts can therefore reveal how pedagogical practices and contextual limitations interact in actual school settings.

This study consequently investigated the pedagogical practices that support students' Arabic communicative competence in religious secondary schools in Kuala Terengganu. It was guided by the central research question: What teaching-related factors support students' Arabic communication in these schools? To address this question, the study pursued the following objectives:

- To explore the communicative approaches that Arabic teachers employ to develop students' Arabic communication in religious secondary schools in Kuala Terengganu.
- To identify the teaching strategies, instructional materials, and technologies that teachers use to increase students' opportunities for oral participation.

- To examine how teacher professionalism, namely Arabic proficiency, pedagogical competence, lesson planning, and professional attitude, shapes the quality of communicative instruction.
- To identify the challenges that constrain communicative Arabic teaching and the ways in which teachers respond to them.

Teachers' accounts identified four interrelated dimensions corresponding to these objectives: communicative approaches, teaching strategies, teacher professionalism, and implementation challenges. These dimensions provide a framework for understanding communicative instruction as an integrated system rather than a collection of isolated techniques.

The study argues that these dimensions should not be treated as an independent checklist. A communicative activity is unlikely to work when learners lack linguistic support; technology adds little when it only displays content; group work can reproduce silence when participation is not structured; and a highly committed teacher may remain restricted by inadequate facilities or an environment in which Arabic is rarely used. Effective instruction therefore depends on alignment among communicative opportunities, scaffolding, teacher capacity, and institutional conditions (Ismail et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2025; Utami, 2016). This integrated interpretation offers a context-sensitive basis for strengthening Arabic communication in Malaysian religious secondary schools without claiming statistical generalisability beyond the qualitative case.

Literature Review

Arabic Communication and Speaking Instruction

Communication involves the purposeful exchange of meaning rather than the reproduction of isolated linguistic forms. Within Arabic education, speaking and listening are central because language functions as a medium of interaction as well as an object of study (Ali et al., 2018; Yaacob & Bakar, 2018). Arabic communication enables learners to participate in academic, religious, and social contexts, while supporting access to texts and knowledge (Fahrurrozi, 2021). However, non-native learners commonly experience restricted vocabulary, fear of error, low confidence, insufficient practice, and instruction that gives greater attention to form than use (Hannani & Bakar, 2019; Riffin & Taat, 2020; Rizan & Baharudin, 2021). These difficulties help explain why grammatical knowledge does not necessarily translate into communicative performance.

Speaking instruction requires systematic opportunities for learners to produce language. Ali et al. (2018) show that oral skills require deliberate implementation in Arabic teaching, while Maromar et al. (2018) emphasise techniques appropriate to learners' stages of development. Oral competence should therefore be treated as an explicit instructional target supported through listening, modelling, repetition, interaction, and feedback rather than as an automatic outcome of grammatical learning. Direct communication practice can also strengthen learners' fluency and confidence (Azizan, 2022). Collectively, these studies support a shift from passive reception towards structured participation.

Communicative Approach and Interaction

The communicative approach gives priority to using language in meaningful contexts. Rather than excluding linguistic form, it places form in the service of meaning. Interaction-based activities such as dialogue, question-and-answer exchanges, group work, presentations, and role-play require students to listen, interpret, formulate responses, and negotiate meaning. Role-play is especially relevant because it approximates real situations within the protected space of a classroom. Abdulhafid et al. (2024) found that role-play can improve Arabic speaking among non-Arabic students, while Kamaruddin et al. (2025) connect interactive communication activities with easier understanding and more rapid language mastery than passive learning.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains learning as mediated social activity, particularly when learners work with a more knowledgeable teacher or peer. The Zone of Proximal Development represents the distance between what learners can do independently and what they can accomplish with assistance (Mahabbati, 2013; Utami, 2016). Scaffolding translates this principle into classroom practice: teachers model expressions, provide prompts, simplify tasks, organise peer support, and gradually withdraw assistance as competence increases (Ismail & Tam, 2016; Utami, 2016). Interaction is therefore educationally valuable when task demands and support allow learners to perform beyond their current independent level.

Language of Instruction and Comprehensible Exposure

Consistent exposure and active engagement are necessary for learners to internalise Arabic expressions and retrieve them with increasing automaticity (Ghani et al., 2018; Rushdi & Asbulah, 2023). Everyday expressions and routine classroom communication can increase meaningful contact with Arabic, but target-language use must remain comprehensible. For beginners and weaker learners, strategic Malay support may clarify difficult content while allowing Arabic to remain the principal medium for manageable instructions, greetings, questions, and interaction. The pedagogical issue is therefore not a rigid choice between Arabic-only and translation-based instruction, but the gradual expansion of meaningful Arabic input without allowing incomprehension to terminate participation.

Teaching Strategies, Resources, and Technology

Effective strategy involves the purposeful selection and sequencing of methods rather than routine dependence on one approach. Ismail et al. (2024) identifies teacher qualification, varied resources, technology, and pedagogy among the factors affecting Arabic teaching effectiveness. Variation across visual, auditory, and experiential modes can make input more accessible and create different pathways into communication. Listening materials provide models of pronunciation and rhythm, visuals clarify meaning, simulation situates language in action, and group tasks create reasons to speak (Ismail et al., 2011; Maromar et al., 2018).

Technology expands the range of linguistic input and interaction available to learners. Video, audio, projected visuals, online resources, Kahoot, and Google Classroom can make language contextualised, repeatable, and engaging (Alzahrani, 2020; Kamaruddin et al., 2025). Digital tools are pedagogically productive, however, only when they serve a communicative function. Video can model situated expressions, audio can support discrimination and imitation, and interactive quizzes can retrieve vocabulary; technology that

merely changes the display surface does not necessarily increase speaking opportunities (Alzahrani, 2020).

Student-Centred Learning

Student-centred learning reorganises classroom participation. Learners undertake tasks, solve problems, collaborate, present, and respond rather than waiting for the teacher to supply all language. Rahmatan and Abdul Ghani (2025) describe collaborative pedagogy as a means of creating communication and teamwork. Within the sociocultural perspective, group discussion and interactive tasks increase access to peer mediation and teacher scaffolding. The educational value lies in accountable participation. Simply placing students in groups is insufficient; tasks need defined outcomes, useful expressions, role allocation, and feedback so that all learners contribute.

Teacher Professionalism

The teacher functions as both a language model and a designer of communicative conditions. Professionalism includes Arabic proficiency, pedagogical competence, planning, and professional attitude. Strong language proficiency enables teachers to provide accurate models, respond flexibly, and sustain classroom interaction, but qualification or proficiency alone is insufficient. Teachers also require a repertoire of methods, knowledge of technology and resources, and the capacity to match tasks to learners' needs (Ismail et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2015).

Planning connects these capacities to observable learning. Zakaria and Norul'azmi (2023) emphasise creative lesson planning that integrates effective techniques and digital tools, while Samah et al. (2020) discuss planning across reading, listening, interaction, and writing. A clear communicative objective should determine the language input, task, scaffolds, assessment evidence, and progression of a lesson. Professional attitude is equally consequential. Teachers who are proactive, open to learning, willing to experiment, and prepared to seek support from experienced colleagues are more likely to adapt instruction rather than reproduce familiar routines.

Constraints on Communicative Instruction

Pedagogy operates within material and social conditions. Limited special rooms, projectors, digital facilities, or internet access restrict teachers' capacity to use audio-visual resources. The absence of an Arabic-speaking culture outside lessons reduces continuity and makes classroom communication feel exceptional. Learner factors also return as immediate pedagogical constraints: limited vocabulary prevents message construction; low confidence reduces willingness to take risks; and weak motivation reduces participation. Kamaruddin et al. (2025) similarly identify inadequate practical speaking exposure as a challenge. These constraints do not negate teacher agency, but they caution against attributing weak outcomes solely to individual teacher effort.

Research Gap

Previous studies identify useful techniques and recurrent barriers, but the local interaction among communicative approaches, instructional strategies, professionalism, and contextual constraints requires closer examination (Ismail et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2025; Zaini et al., 2019). Religious secondary schools teach Arabic within a specific curriculum and

institutional culture, and teachers' experience can reveal how general pedagogical principles are enacted under actual conditions in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. This study therefore conceptualises teaching as a layered system: communicative orientation establishes the instructional purpose, strategies organise participation and resources, professionalism enables informed adaptation, and contextual challenges shape the limits of implementation.

Methodology

Research Design and Setting

The study adopted a qualitative case-study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of Arabic communication problems and the teaching practices used to address them. The case was situated in three religious secondary schools in the district of Kuala Terengganu: *Sekolah Menengah Agama Sultan Zainal Abidin Ladang*, *Sekolah Menengah Agama Khairiah*, and *Sekolah Menengah Agama (Atas) Sultan Zainal Abidin*. The schools implement the *Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini*, and the participating teachers taught *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'asirah*. A case-study design was appropriate because the research sought teachers' views, experiences, strategies, and challenges in their natural educational settings without manipulation of variables.

Participants and sampling

Twelve Arabic teachers participated as key informants. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals able to provide relevant, information-rich accounts. Eligibility required that participants teach *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'asirah*, possess more than three years of Arabic teaching experience, hold at least a diploma in Arabic or a related field, and be able to commit throughout the study. School administrators granted permission and assisted in identifying eligible teachers. The sample was designed for depth and contextual relevance rather than statistical representation.

Instrument and Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews constituted the main instrument. Open-ended questions enabled participants to explain their practices, experiences, perceptions, and challenges, while allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification and depth. Five questions addressed teaching methods, planning for active Arabic communication, improvement of pedagogical skill, the contribution of audio, video and authentic situations, and challenges in teaching communication together with teachers' responses to them. Interviews lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and were subsequently transcribed. Participants were assigned codes to protect their identities, and transcript access was restricted to the researcher.

Instrument Validation and Trustworthiness

The interview instrument underwent expert review to assess its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research question. Revisions were made in response to the reviewers' feedback before data collection. Trustworthiness procedures included checking the consistency of interpretation, maintaining records of the analytical process, participant confirmation, and triangulation. These procedures were intended to reduce interpretive error and make the analytical progression from interview evidence to themes transparent.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically. The researcher first became familiar with the data through repeated reading, then identified meaningful units and generated initial codes. Related codes were grouped into candidate themes, which were reviewed against the transcripts and research question. Themes and subthemes were subsequently defined, named, and organised before the findings were reported. The analysis produced four themes and fourteen subthemes: communicative approaches (interaction-based activities, emphasis on speaking, and language of instruction); teaching strategies (technology, methodological variety, student-centred learning, and instructional materials); teacher professionalism (teacher language proficiency, pedagogical skill, lesson planning, and teacher attitude); and challenges (infrastructure, environment, and students).

Results

Overview of Themes

The teachers' accounts identified four teaching-related factors that shaped the development of students' Arabic communication: a communicative approach, strategic organisation of teaching, teacher professionalism, and challenges affecting implementation. The first three themes describe pedagogical resources and actions; the fourth describes conditions that reduce their reach. Together they show that communicative development depends on both the design of classroom participation and the capacity to sustain it.

Communicative Approach

a) Interaction-based activities

Teachers described interaction as a primary route to communication. They used group activities, dialogue, question-and-answer exchanges, presentations, and role-play or *tamsil*. One example involved students dramatising the performance of the funeral prayer after engaging with a related Arabic passage. The activity linked textual understanding, action, and oral explanation, making the language meaningful rather than isolated. Teachers observed that learners enjoyed such activities and were more willing to participate. Repetition within interaction also reinforced vocabulary: students heard and reused words in a purposeful sequence instead of memorising them without context.

The accounts indicate that interaction served several functions simultaneously. It created speaking time, made meaning visible through action, exposed students to peers' language, and reduced the social weight of individual performance. Presentations and role-play required preparation followed by public use, while pair or group exchanges allowed rehearsal. Question-and-answer sequences enabled teachers to diagnose comprehension and prompt brief production even among weaker learners. The common feature was that students had to do something with Arabic.

b) Emphasis on speaking.

Participants stressed the need to foreground oral use rather than allowing written work and grammatical explanation to dominate. Teachers introduced daily expressions, asked spontaneous questions, encouraged short responses, and repeated useful phrases. Speaking was treated as a routine extending across the lesson rather than a single formal activity. Some teachers began lessons with familiar Arabic exchanges so that greetings, requests, instructions, and classroom management became repeated communicative input.

This emphasis did not mean abandoning other skills. Listening supplied models, reading provided content, and vocabulary supported message formation. Rather, teachers attempted to connect these components to speech. A passage could lead to discussion or performance; audio could lead to imitation and response; and vocabulary could be recycled through conversation. The findings therefore present speaking as an organising outcome around which several language skills were integrated.

c) Language of instruction.

Teachers differed in the extent to which they used Arabic as the medium of classroom communication. They valued Arabic exposure and regarded consistent use of simple expressions as essential. At the same time, they recognised that exclusive Arabic could prevent weaker students from understanding instructions or content. Participants consequently described flexible bilingual practice. Arabic was used for manageable routines, modelling, and interaction, while Malay was introduced when explanation was necessary. Teachers sometimes translated or restated an Arabic utterance to preserve meaning and participation.

The relevant factor was thus not maximal Arabic irrespective of comprehension, but sustained and comprehensible Arabic. Teachers calibrated language according to proficiency and task difficulty. Stronger students could tolerate longer Arabic exchanges, whereas weaker students needed shorter expressions, repetition, gesture, examples, or Malay support. This gradual approach aimed to expand students' Arabic tolerance over time.

b) Teaching strategy

a) Use of technology

Teachers reported using audio, video, projected visuals, digital applications, and online materials as teaching aids. Audio exposed students to pronunciation and listening models, while video provided contextual cues, speakers, actions, and situations. Visual resources made vocabulary and meaning easier to grasp. Teachers also referred to interactive platforms such as Kahoot and Google Classroom as resources that could increase interest, provide practice, and diversify lesson delivery.

Technology was particularly helpful for visual and auditory learners and for content that was difficult to demonstrate through verbal explanation alone. Replay enabled repeated listening, and authentic or semi-authentic clips introduced varieties of language use beyond the teacher's own voice. However, access was uneven. Technology depended on working equipment, rooms, connectivity, and preparation time, issues that reappeared under the challenge theme.

b) Methodological variety

Participants avoided dependence on a single method. They combined individual and group tasks, listening, speaking, questioning, repetition, simulation, performance, games, visual explanation, and digital interaction. Variation was used to respond to different proficiency levels and learning preferences, retain attention, and give students multiple encounters with the same language. Teachers selected methods according to the lesson content and intended outcome rather than using novelty as an end in itself.

The teachers' descriptions suggest that variety was most productive when methods were sequenced. A teacher could introduce vocabulary visually, model pronunciation through audio or speech, allow pair rehearsal, and conclude with a role-play or presentation. Such sequencing lowered the difficulty of production by preparing students before expecting independent speech. It also enabled formative observation at several points.

c) Student-centred learning

Teachers planned activities that shifted responsibility for language production to students. Group tasks, collaborative problem solving, discussion, presentations, and task-based activities required learners to prepare and communicate. Student-centred structures increased the amount of potential speaking time because several groups could interact concurrently, rather than one student responding to the teacher at a time.

Participants nevertheless remained active as facilitators. They supplied expressions, clarified vocabulary, monitored groups, corrected strategically, and encouraged reluctant learners. The findings do not describe student-centred teaching as teacher absence. It involved a change from continuous explanation to the design and support of learner activity. Teachers attempted to create a safe environment in which mistakes were part of learning and students could practise before public performance.

d) Instructional materials

Participants viewed instructional materials as mechanisms for attracting attention, clarifying meaning, and supporting communication. Materials included audio, video, pictures, textual excerpts, presentation media, and representations of actual situations. Concrete and contextual resources helped students connect words with referents and actions. Situational materials also provided a reason for particular expressions to be used.

Teachers' selection of materials reflected learner diversity. Auditory input supported listening and pronunciation, visual materials supported comprehension and memory, and scenarios supported kinaesthetic or experiential participation. The value of a material depended on how it was embedded in an activity. Materials that prompted prediction, imitation, response, dialogue, or performance contributed more directly to communication than materials used only for display.

c) *Teacher professionalism*

a) Arabic proficiency.

Teachers regarded their own command of Arabic as foundational. A teacher who can speak accurately and confidently supplies a credible model, maintains interaction, explains alternatives, and responds to unanticipated student contributions. Participants acknowledged the need to continue improving their language through reading, media, online resources, and contact with more proficient speakers. Digital access made ongoing exposure easier, but improvement required deliberate practice.

Teacher proficiency also influenced the quantity and quality of Arabic used in class. Limited confidence could encourage reliance on Malay and reduce spontaneous interaction. Stronger proficiency enabled teachers to adjust expressions without abandoning Arabic, paraphrase when students did not understand, and extend dialogue beyond scripted examples. The

finding therefore links teacher learning directly to students' opportunities for input and interaction.

b) Pedagogical competence

Participants described professional development through courses, workshops, peer learning, observation of experienced teachers, and online sharing. They saw pedagogical skill as broader than knowledge of subject matter. It included managing communicative tasks, using twenty-first-century learning approaches, integrating technology, selecting resources, differentiating for learner levels, and sustaining participation.

Teachers valued practical learning from colleagues because it translated general recommendations into workable classroom routines. Experienced teachers could demonstrate how to handle reluctant students, organise groups, simplify communication, or adapt an activity when time and facilities were limited. Social media and online professional communities expanded access to examples and materials, though teachers still needed to judge their suitability.

c) Lesson planning

Participants identified planning as a determinant of whether communicative intentions became actual classroom activity. The daily lesson plan clarified objectives, content, methods, materials, time, and expected outcomes. A clear objective helped teachers decide whether students were expected to recognise expressions, conduct a dialogue, respond orally, present information, or perform a situation. Planning also enabled teachers to prepare scaffolds and anticipate difficulties.

Communicative lessons required attention to transition and time. Teachers needed to reserve sufficient minutes for student production, not consume the lesson through explanation. They also needed to organise group size, instructions, resources, and feedback. The findings imply that spontaneous teacher talk, although useful, cannot substitute for a planned progression toward observable student communication.

d) Teacher attitude.

Respondents highlighted proactivity, openness, creativity, patience, and willingness to improve. Teachers who regarded constraints as problems to be solved sought alternative materials, learned digital tools, consulted colleagues, and modified tasks. A positive attitude also shaped students' emotional experience. Encouragement and non-punitive correction reduced fear, while visible teacher commitment signalled that communication mattered.

Professional attitude did not remove structural barriers, but it affected adaptation. A teacher could use printed visuals when projection was unavailable, organise peer work despite limited space, or employ simple Arabic routines without specialised technology. At the same time, the findings do not justify transferring institutional responsibility to individual goodwill; persistent shortages remained constraints.

*d) Challenges**a) Infrastructure*

Teachers reported shortages of special rooms, projectors, technological facilities, and digital spaces. These limitations restricted the use of audio-visual materials and made it difficult to create rich listening and speaking experiences. Shared equipment could add logistical difficulty, and unreliable access discouraged routines that depended on technology. The infrastructure challenge mattered because spoken communication benefits from audible models, visible situations, recording, replay, and interactive resources.

b) Language environment

Participants found it difficult to sustain Arabic beyond formal lessons. Students and teachers did not consistently use Arabic outside the classroom, reducing exposure and practice. As a result, the communicative classroom became an isolated event rather than part of a wider school culture. Expressions learned during lessons were not necessarily recycled in corridors, assemblies, hostels, or co-curricular activities. This lack of continuity slowed automatisisation and made students more likely to revert to Malay.

c) Learner readiness

Teachers identified weak vocabulary, low confidence, and limited motivation as major instructional challenges. Students who could not retrieve basic words struggled to construct messages; those afraid of mistakes avoided speaking; and those with low motivation participated minimally. These factors interacted. Vocabulary limitations increased hesitation, hesitation reduced practice, and reduced practice preserved weakness. Teachers responded through repetition, encouragement, simplified tasks, group support, and varied activities, but the challenge remained uneven across learners.

Discussion*Communicative Instruction as an Architecture of Participation*

The central finding is that Arabic communication improves when instruction is organised around participation rather than coverage alone. The communicative approach was not represented as a rejection of grammar, reading, or translation. Teachers instead repositioned these resources so that they supported meaningful use. This distinction matters. A lesson can contain a dialogue yet remain non-communicative if students merely recite it without choice or understanding. Conversely, a grammar or reading lesson can contribute to communication when students use its language to ask, explain, perform, or respond (Ali et al., 2018; Yaacob & Bakar, 2018).

Interaction-based activities increased opportunities to retrieve and assemble language under social conditions. Role-play was especially useful because it provided a situation, roles, a sequence of actions, and a communicative purpose. These contextual supports can reduce the abstract burden of speaking by connecting expressions with visible actions and familiar events. The reported dramatisation of the funeral prayer illustrates how subject content, bodily action, peer observation, and Arabic language can converge. Abdulhafid et al. (2024) similarly associate role-play with improved Arabic speaking, while Kamaruddin et al. (2025) support interactive rather than passive learning.

The deeper implication is that speaking time should be considered an instructional resource that must be deliberately budgeted. In a teacher-fronted exchange, only one learner may speak while others wait. Pair and group structures multiply simultaneous production, but only if the task prevents stronger students from monopolising the work. Role allocation, turn requirements, target expressions, and individual reporting can make participation accountable. Thus, student-centred organisation should be evaluated by the distribution and quality of language use, not by the superficial presence of groups (Rahmatan & Abdul Ghani, 2025; Utami, 2016).

Repetition also needs reinterpretation. Mechanical repetition can be monotonous, yet the findings show that repetition embedded in interaction helps vocabulary become available for use. Learners need multiple encounters with expressions across listening, guided production, dialogue, and performance. The pedagogical task is to vary the communicative purpose while recycling language. A phrase might first be modelled, then used in a pair exchange, later adapted in a role-play, and finally retrieved in an unscripted question. Such recycling bridges recognition and spontaneous access (Alqahtani, 2015; Kamaruddin et al., 2025).

Calibrating Arabic Exposure and Bilingual Support

The language-of-instruction finding resists two simplistic positions: that maximum Arabic automatically produces learning, or that frequent translation is necessary for understanding. Teachers described a graded approach in which Arabic exposure is made comprehensible and gradually expanded. This aligns with the challenge posed by heterogeneous proficiency. Learners cannot develop Arabic communication without substantial Arabic input, but input that remains unintelligible may produce withdrawal rather than acquisition (Ghani et al., 2018; Rushdi & Asbulah, 2023).

Strategic Malay use can function as scaffolding when it is brief, targeted, and followed by renewed Arabic use. It becomes counterproductive when it removes the need to process Arabic or becomes the default language for every instruction. A practical progression emerges from the findings: teachers can establish a stable repertoire of classroom Arabic, accompany new expressions with gesture or visual cues, check understanding through action, and reserve Malay for concepts that cannot yet be made accessible. As learners improve, the support is reduced (Ismail & Tam, 2016; Utami, 2016).

This approach reflects the Zone of Proximal Development. The relevant question is not whether a task is Arabic-only, but whether support enables learners to perform at a level just beyond their independent capacity. Scaffolding may include sentence frames, word banks, rehearsal time, partner support, teacher modelling, or a bilingual gloss. Its quality is revealed by eventual withdrawal: if support never diminishes, students remain dependent; if it is removed prematurely, participation collapses. Utami (2016) provides the sociocultural basis for this mediated progression.

Teachers' own Arabic proficiency is decisive in this calibration. A proficient teacher can simplify, paraphrase, slow down, repeat, and demonstrate meaning while remaining largely in Arabic. A less confident teacher may shift quickly to Malay because alternative Arabic formulations are unavailable. Teacher language development is therefore not separate from pedagogy. It enlarges the repertoire of scaffolds teachers can provide and increases the

authenticity and responsiveness of classroom interaction (Ismail et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2015).

From Technological Presence to Communicative Function

Technology emerged as a significant strategy, but the findings warrant a critical interpretation. Audio, video, images, Kahoot, and Google Classroom are not intrinsically communicative. Their value depends on the learner action they enable. A video watched silently may increase exposure but not production. The same video can become communicative when students predict, identify expressions, imitate pronunciation, answer questions, reconstruct a scene, or perform an alternative ending. Alzahrani (2020) supports the capacity of technology to enrich learning, and Kamaruddin et al. (2025) associate interactive tools with motivation and retention, but enrichment must be tied to the intended speaking outcome.

The strongest use of technology in this context is multimodal and recursive. Visual cues reduce semantic ambiguity, audio supplies phonological models, replay supports noticing, and recording can enable self-evaluation. Teachers can sequence these functions: learners first listen for gist, then notice a phrase, rehearse it, record or perform a response, and receive feedback. This sequence converts media consumption into language production (Alzahrani, 2020; Kamaruddin et al., 2025).

Infrastructure findings place an important limit on technology-centred recommendations. If projectors, speakers, rooms, devices, or connectivity are unreliable, a pedagogy that assumes continuous digital access will widen differences between classes and schools. The appropriate institutional response is to improve access and maintenance. The appropriate pedagogical response is to design functional equivalents: printed scene cards can replace projected images, teacher modelling can replace an audio clip, and offline files can reduce dependence on connectivity. These adaptations preserve the communicative function, though they do not eliminate the need for institutional investment (Ismail et al., 2024; Zaini et al., 2019).

Variety, Coherence, and Cognitive Load

Participants valued varied methods and materials, consistent with Ismail et al. (2024). Variety can accommodate differences in learner readiness, sustain attention, and provide repeated contact with language. Yet variety can become fragmentation when each lesson introduces a new tool without sufficient practice. The pedagogical implication is therefore not simply to use more activities, but to vary the mode while maintaining linguistic coherence.

A coherent lesson might centre on a small set of expressions and move from accessible input to guided and freer production. Visuals establish meaning; teacher or audio modelling establishes form and pronunciation; pairs rehearse with frames; groups adapt the exchange; and individuals complete a brief transfer task. Methods differ, but the language and communicative outcome remain stable. Such sequencing connects modelling with increasingly independent oral use (Ismail et al., 2011; Maromar et al., 2018).

Differentiation is also embedded in variety. Weaker learners can use prompts and shorter turns, while stronger learners extend answers, justify choices, or improvise. Both participate

in the same communicative event at different levels of complexity. This is more consistent with the Zone of Proximal Development than assigning all learners an identical open-ended speaking demand. The criterion is supported growth, not uniform performance (Ismail & Tam, 2016; Utami, 2016).

Student-Centred Learning as Designed Interdependence

The student-centred theme is best understood as designed interdependence. Rahmatan and Abdul Ghani (2025) support collaborative pedagogy, but collaboration does not occur automatically when desks are rearranged. A communicative group task should contain an information gap, a shared outcome, or complementary roles so that students need one another's contributions. Without such structure, learners may divide written work silently, revert to Malay, or allow one proficient member to complete the task.

Teacher facilitation remains central. Teachers establish norms for error, model the task, provide essential language, observe interaction, and decide when to intervene. Immediate correction of every error can interrupt fluency and increase anxiety, whereas an absence of feedback can allow misunderstanding to persist. The findings support a balanced approach: during fluency work, teachers note common errors and provide delayed, selective feedback; during modelling or focused practice, they offer more direct guidance. Encouragement also protects learners' willingness to take the communicative risks through which proficiency develops (Rahmatan & Abdul Ghani, 2025; Utami, 2016).

Professionalism as Adaptive Expertise

The professionalism theme integrates knowledge, action, and disposition. Arabic proficiency enables modelling; pedagogical knowledge informs task design; planning allocates time and support; and professional attitude sustains improvement. Treating these as separate competencies understates their interaction. A teacher with strong Arabic but weak pedagogy may dominate talk, while a creative teacher with insufficient language confidence may struggle to provide accurate models. A detailed plan without openness to adjustment may also fail when learners respond unexpectedly. Effective communication teaching therefore requires adaptive expertise (Ismail et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2015).

Professional development should mirror this integrated demand. Generic workshops on technology or twenty-first-century learning may not change Arabic classroom practice unless teachers design, rehearse, observe, and revise actual communicative lessons. Peer observation and mentoring, highlighted by participants, are promising because they make tacit decisions visible: how a teacher simplifies an instruction, forms groups, prompts a reluctant learner, or transitions from modelling to independent speaking. Online sharing extends access, but locally grounded professional communities can test whether an activity works with the curriculum, timetable, learner level, and available facilities (Ismail et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2015).

Lesson planning is the mechanism that translates expertise into opportunity. Effective planning requires clear outcomes and coherent daily lesson plans, consistent with Zakaria and Norul'azmi (2023) and Samah et al. (2020). A communicative outcome should specify observable language use. "Understand dialogue" is less actionable than "conduct a two-

minute exchange using greeting, request, and clarification expressions.” The latter allows alignment among input, activity, scaffolding, and assessment.

Planning must also protect production time. Teachers may intend to conduct communication activities but spend most of the lesson explaining vocabulary and grammar. Backward planning can reduce this slippage: identify the final speaking performance, determine the minimum language needed, provide concise modelling, and allocate the largest block to rehearsal and use. Formative assessment can be simple, such as an observation checklist, a short recorded response, peer feedback, or an exit exchange, but it should capture whether students communicated, not merely whether they completed a worksheet (Samah et al., 2020; Zakaria & Norul’azmi, 2023).

Challenges as Interacting Constraints

The challenge theme shows that weaknesses are mutually reinforcing. Limited infrastructure reduces access to rich input; weak exposure outside class slows vocabulary retrieval; slow retrieval reduces confidence; low confidence reduces participation; and reduced participation limits improvement. This cycle explains why isolated interventions may have modest effects. A new application cannot compensate for an absence of speaking routines, and a speaking activity cannot fully succeed when students lack essential vocabulary or psychological safety (Alqahtani, 2015; Ghani et al., 2018; Kamaruddin et al., 2025).

The learner challenges reported by teachers should not be interpreted as fixed deficits. Vocabulary knowledge is closely associated with speaking performance, while confidence and motivation are shaped by learners’ experiences of participation and success (Alqahtani, 2015; Riffin & Taat, 2020; Rizan & Baharudin, 2021). Teachers can influence these factors through graded tasks, high-frequency expressions, predictable routines, peer rehearsal, and recognition of progress. However, individual teachers cannot single-handedly construct a whole-school Arabic environment or compensate indefinitely for missing infrastructure.

The limited use of Arabic outside class suggests a need for continuity across settings. School language environments are associated with learners’ vocabulary development and opportunities for oral practice (Ghani et al., 2018; Abdul Rahman & Baharudin, 2023). Schools could establish a limited set of weekly expressions for routine situations, integrate Arabic into assemblies or co-curricular activities, and create low-stakes speaking spaces. Classroom expressions should be selected so that they transfer into school life, while out-of-class routines should recycle language already taught.

An Integrated model of Effective Teaching

Taken together, the themes support an integrated model with four layers. The first is communicative purpose: students use Arabic to accomplish meaningful acts. The second is instructional design: teachers sequence multimodal input, scaffolding, interaction, and feedback. The third is professional capacity: teachers continually develop the language, pedagogy, planning, and disposition required to adapt the design. The fourth is enabling conditions: schools provide facilities, time, and a language culture that sustain practice (Ismail et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2025; Utami, 2016).

These layers are interdependent. Communicative purpose without design produces vague injunctions to speak Arabic. Design without professional capacity becomes formulaic, while professional capacity without enabling conditions is exhausted by continual workaround. Enabling conditions without communicative purpose can leave technology underused. The practical unit of improvement is therefore not a device or isolated method, but a repeated cycle of meaningful use supported by competent teaching and institutional continuity (Alzahrani, 2020; Ismail et al., 2024; Mohamed Shalikin & Abdul Ghani, 2025; Zaini et al., 2019).

Theoretical Implications

The findings reinforce a sociocultural interpretation of Arabic communication development. Language learning occurs through mediated participation, and teacher support is most useful when it enables performance that learners cannot yet sustain independently. The Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding explain why interaction, peer work, teacher modelling, differentiated prompts, and progressive language exposure cohere. They also clarify why task demands must remain challenging but attainable with support (Ismail & Tam, 2016; Mahabbati, 2013; Utami, 2016).

The study adds a contextual refinement. In a non-Arabic environment, the teacher does not merely scaffold individual tasks but helps construct a temporary community of Arabic use. Classroom routines, materials, roles, and norms form the social infrastructure within which speech becomes possible. The gradual transfer of responsibility must therefore occur both linguistically and socially: students need more language, but they also need increasing ownership of interaction (Ghani et al., 2018; Abdul Rahman & Baharudin, 2023).

Practical Implications

For teachers, the priority is to make communication an explicit, assessable outcome and build a small number of well-scaffolded speaking routines. Daily Arabic expressions, pair rehearsal, purposeful group tasks, role-play, and brief presentations can be systematically recycled. Technology should be selected by function (modelling, contextualising, rehearsing, recording, or responding), and digital input should lead to observable learner action (Abdulhafid et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2018; Maromar et al., 2018).

For school leaders, infrastructure and professional development should be connected. Providing equipment without training may have little effect, while training without access produces frustration. Schools should support peer observation, shared resource banks, mentoring, and collaborative planning focused on actual Arabic communication lessons. They should also create consistent, low-stakes occasions for Arabic use beyond the classroom (Alzahrani, 2020; Ismail et al., 2024; Zaini et al., 2019).

For curriculum and assessment, oral communication requires protected time and visible status. If schemes of work privilege written accuracy, teachers may reduce speaking despite recognising its importance. Communicative outcomes and formative oral evidence should therefore be embedded in lesson planning and instructional monitoring (Samah et al., 2020; Zakaria & Norul'azmi, 2023).

Limitations

The findings represent the perspectives of twelve purposively selected teachers in three religious secondary schools in one district. They illuminate experience but do not estimate prevalence or causal effects. Student voices and direct classroom observations were not included, and teachers' accounts may reflect intended or remembered practice rather than every enacted classroom event. Future studies could combine teacher interviews with observations, student interviews, lesson artefacts, and measures of speaking development while retaining sensitivity to the local curriculum and school environment.

Conclusion

This study analysed the pedagogical practices that support Arabic communicative competence among students in religious secondary schools in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. Four themes emerged: communicative approaches, teaching strategies, teacher professionalism, and implementation challenges. Teachers supported communication through interaction-based activities, explicit attention to speaking, and a calibrated balance between sustained Arabic exposure and strategic Malay support. They diversified methods and instructional materials, integrated technology, and organised student-centred tasks. These practices depended on teachers' Arabic proficiency, pedagogical competence, lesson planning, and proactive professional disposition. Their implementation was constrained by limited infrastructure, an insufficient Arabic-speaking environment, and differences in students' vocabulary, confidence, and motivation.

The most important conclusion is that no single method explains effective Arabic communication teaching. Improvement emerges when meaningful participation, comprehensible input, repeated production, adaptive scaffolding, and feedback are coherently planned. Technology is useful when it prompts language use; group work is useful when participation is structured; Arabic-medium instruction is useful when learners can access meaning; and professional enthusiasm is sustainable when institutions supply facilities and continuity.

Accordingly, teachers should plan backwards from observable communicative performances, reserve substantial lesson time for learner production, recycle a manageable repertoire of expressions across contexts, and differentiate support according to readiness. Schools should pair infrastructure with practical professional learning and extend familiar classroom Arabic into routine school interactions. Within the limits of a qualitative case study, the findings offer a grounded account of teaching as a participation system. The development of Arabic communication is not achieved by asking students to speak more in the abstract; it is achieved by designing conditions in which they can understand, attempt, receive support, repeat, and gradually communicate with greater independence.

Theoretically, this study contributes to existing knowledge in three respects. First, it extends sociocultural accounts of language learning (Mahabbati, 2013; Utami, 2016) by showing that, in a foreign-language setting where the classroom is often learners' principal site of Arabic use, scaffolding operates simultaneously at linguistic, social, and institutional levels: teachers calibrate Arabic and Malay input, structure interdependence among learners, and rely on school conditions that sustain Arabic use beyond the lesson. Second, whereas previous Malaysian studies have largely catalogued discrete techniques or recurrent barriers

(Ismail et al., 2011; Ismail et al., 2024; Zaini et al., 2019), this study advances an integrated four-layer model comprising communicative purpose, instructional design, professional capacity, and enabling conditions. The model reframes teaching effectiveness as alignment among these layers rather than the adoption of any single method. Third, it refines two recurring debates in Arabic pedagogy by conceptualising first-language support as a graduated and withdrawable scaffold rather than an either-or choice, and by defining the value of technology by the learner action it enables rather than by its presence in the classroom.

Contextually, the study provides empirical evidence from religious secondary schools implementing the *Kurikulum Bersepadu Dini*, a setting in which Arabic is simultaneously a school subject, a medium of religious scholarship, and an intended language of communication, yet one that remains underrepresented relative to research conducted in higher education (Abdulhafid et al., 2024; Kamaruddin et al., 2025; Rushdi & Asbulah, 2023). By foregrounding the accounts of experienced teachers of *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'asirah*, it complements learner-focused evidence from government-aided religious schools (Mohamed Shalikin & Abdul Ghani, 2025) and explains how communicative intentions are mediated by lesson time, facilities, and the limited circulation of Arabic in school life. The resulting model offers curriculum planners, school leaders, religious education authorities, and teacher-education programmes a practical diagnostic for locating where communicative instruction breaks down, whether in purpose, design, capacity, or conditions, and for targeting support accordingly. Although derived from one district, the analysis offers analytic rather than statistical transferability to comparable non-Arabic-speaking contexts in which Arabic is acquired mainly through formal schooling.

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