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ARABIC LANGUAGE IMMERSION MODELS IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL MULTI-CAMPUS STUDY

Nuraini*[1], Cahya Edi Setyawan[2], Aisyatul Hanun[3], Siti Rauhillah[4], Nada Ibrahim Alribdi[5]

[1] Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo, Indonesia
[2] STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[3] Universitas Ibrahimy, Indonesia
[4] IAI Hamzanwadi Pancor Lombok Timur, Indonesia
[5] Princes Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

Arabic language immersion has been widely recognized as an effective approach to second language acquisition; however, its implementation in Islamic higher education remains underexplored, particularly within culturally specific contexts like Indonesia. This study aims to explore and conceptualize a contextually grounded model of Arabic language immersion in Indonesian Islamic universities through a phenomenological lens. Research was conducted at three prominent institutions with established Arabic programs: UIN Sunan Kalijaga, University of Darussalam Gontor, and Ar-Raayah College of Arabic Language in Sukabumi. A total of 18 participants—including instructors, curriculum developers, and students—were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover patterns from participants' lived experiences. The findings reveal that effective immersion is structured around four interrelated components: (1) an integrated and spiral curriculum, (2) intensive Arabic-only environments, (3) religious-cultural contextualization through Islamic practices, and (4) sustained institutional support. These elements form a holistic immersion framework that aligns linguistic competence with Islamic educational values. The study contributes to the theoretical discourse on language immersion by offering a culturally embedded model. It provides practical guidance for Islamic institutions aiming to enhance Arabic programs through authentic, pedagogically coherent strategies.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Nuraini,
Departement of Islamic Religius Studies,
Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo,
Jl. Budi Utomo No. 10, Ronowijayan, Kec. Ponorogo, Kab. Ponorogo, Jawa Timur 63471
Email: nuraini@umpo.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Arabic holds a central position in Islamic higher education in Indonesia, as it serves as the primary language for accessing classical Islamic sciences and a crucial medium for engaging with contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse (Abdullah, 2017). Active Arabic proficiency, particularly in speaking and real-time comprehension (Effendi, 2024), has become increasingly urgent in response to the growing academic and professional demands placed upon students in Islamic higher education institutions (Haq & Anwar, 2024). However, Arabic instruction at many Islamic universities remains dominated by grammar-translation approaches, which tend to foster passive language skills (Wahba et al., 2022). In this context, language immersion emerges as a strategic pedagogical alternative for enhancing students' communicative competence. The immersion model emphasizes the intensive use of Arabic in both academic and everyday social settings, allowing language acquisition to occur naturally and contextually (Rahmawati et al., 2025). Several Islamic institutions in Indonesia have begun to implement variations of this approach to strengthen Arabic language learning outcomes.

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of improving Arabic language proficiency, the reality in many Indonesian Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIs) reveals a significant gap between instructional goals and actual student performance (Abdurahman et al., 2018). Many students continue to struggle with actively speaking and comprehending Arabic, even after years of study. This reflects shortcomings in curriculum design and teaching strategies that fail to emphasize communicative and contextualized language use. On the ground, several Islamic universities have attempted to foster Arabic language environments through extracurricular activities, Arabic-speaking dormitories, and curriculum enrichment programs (Jundi et al., 2024). However, these initiatives often yield inconsistent results. The disconnection between formal and informal language learning activities has resulted in a lack of sustained Arabic usage in daily campus life (Shendy, 2022). This issue is further complicated by the varying institutional cultures and structures, which influence how Arabic immersion is implemented across campuses.

One pedagogical model considered effective in addressing the lack of Arabic language competence is the immersion approach (Nasirin et al., 2023). This model integrates the target language, Arabic, into all aspects of student life, both inside and outside the classroom. In other words, students are not only taught Arabic through structural or grammatical instruction. Still, they are also encouraged to use it actively in everyday activities, such as conversations in the dormitory, discussion forums, and organizational events. International research has demonstrated that this approach significantly accelerates second-language acquisition. In Indonesia, institutions such as the University of Darussalam Gontor and Ma'had Ar-Raayah have begun to develop Arabic-speaking campus environments tailored to their respective Islamic visions and institutional cultures. This approach represents a promising alternative for reforming Arabic language education in Islamic higher education institutions.

Several previous studies have explored the effectiveness of immersion in Arabic language learning across various educational settings in Indonesia. Soleha et al. found that Arabic-speaking environments in traditional pesantren significantly enhanced students' speaking abilities (Soleha et al., 2024). Similarly, Lubis and Widiawati examined students' epistemological experiences in immersion programs at Islamic boarding schools, revealing

deep reflective engagement (Lubis & Widiawati, 2022). A case study at the "Ma'had Jami'i" Arabic dormitory of Siliwangi State Islamic University employed interviews, classroom observations, and document reviews to show that full immersion linking Theory and informal practice boosted proficiency and motivation despite certain psychosocial challenges (Abdurahman et al., 2018). In North Sumatra, Nasution and Zulheddi's research emphasized that institutional policies and Arabic language zones played a crucial role in students' engagement and communicative competence (Nasution & Zulheddi, 2020). Research from Syuhadak, Hilmi, and Rosyidah highlighted how combining structured classroom learning with extracurricular activities in multicultural State Islamic Universities of East Java effectively supported students' Arabic acquisition (Syuhadak et al., 2021). Collectively, these studies underscore the transformative potential of immersion while pointing to institutional, cultural, and pedagogical factors that shape its outcomes. However, although these studies offer valuable contributions, most have focused primarily on measurable outcomes such as performance scores or skill gains, offering limited insight into students' subjective experiences during the immersion process. Additionally, the research tends to be localized and lacks comparative analysis across institutions with different pedagogical approaches and organizational cultures.

From the existing literature, it is evident that a gap remains in comprehensive, phenomenologically oriented studies on Arabic language immersion within Islamic universities. In particular, few studies have explored how students subjectively experience, internalize, and interpret their learning processes within immersion environments. Additionally, little research compares immersion practices across institutions with diverse curricular designs, teaching methods, and institutional cultures, such as between state Islamic universities, pesantren-based universities, and Arabic language colleges. These contextual differences likely affect how immersion is designed, implemented, and experienced. Therefore, a multi-campus study that examines not only the learning outcomes but also the lived experiences of students as active learners is urgently needed. Addressing this gap forms the central rationale for the present research.

This study's novelty lies in its use of a phenomenological approach to deeply explore students' lived experiences within Arabic immersion programs across three Islamic institutions with distinct institutional characteristics. Unlike prior studies that focused on learning outcomes, this research emphasizes how students perceive, construct meaning from, and emotionally respond to their Arabic-speaking environments. Furthermore, this study is cross-institutional, involving UIN Sunan Kalijaga (a state-run PTKIN), the University of Darussalam Gontor (a modern pesantren-based waqf university), and Ma'had Ar-Raayah Sukabumi (a specialized Arabic language college). Each represents a unique educational ecosystem. Thus, this research offers a new perspective by integrating learners' personal experiences, pedagogical strategies, and institutional dynamics into a comprehensive and contextual study of Arabic immersion practices.

This study aims to explore how Arabic language immersion is designed, implemented, and experienced by students at three Indonesian Islamic universities. It focuses on pedagogical strategies, students' lived experiences, and the integration of formal and informal learning environments. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to understand not just what happens in immersion programs, but how and why students engage with them. The research is limited to UIN Sunan Kalijaga, University of Darussalam Gontor, and

Ma'had Ar-Raayah, and does not aim to generalize across all institutions, but rather to offer contextual insights for future Arabic language instruction.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in transcendental phenomenology, following the philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl and the methodological steps of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994). This approach is appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of students engaged in Arabic language immersion programs at Islamic higher education institutions. To maintain epoche—the suspension of researcher bias—ongoing reflexive journaling and peer-debriefing sessions were employed throughout the research process (Neubauer et al., 2019a). The core objective was to uncover the essence of immersion experiences by focusing on students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions in naturalistic settings.

Data collection was conducted at three purposefully selected institutions representing varied immersion models: (1) UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, a state university with formal curriculum-based immersion; (2) University of Darussalam Gontor, a pesantren-based waqf institution with full cultural immersion; and (3) Ar-Raayah College of Arabic Language Sukabumi, a specialized Arabic institution with structured dormitory immersion. These sites were chosen to ensure contextual variation and cross-institutional comparison. Using maximum variation purposive sampling, twelve informants were selected—nine students and three program-managing lecturers—who had participated in immersion for at least one semester. Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged after the tenth interview.

Data were collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes, with follow-ups), participant observation (two weeks per institution in classrooms, dormitories, and student activities), and document analysis (curricula, language policies, and institutional guidelines) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Analysis followed Creswell's phenomenological procedure: identifying significant statements, clustering meaning units, constructing textual and structural descriptions, and synthesizing experiential essences (Moustakas, 1994). Manual thematic coding was used, with intercoder validation cycles to ensure reliability. Trustworthiness was established through method and source triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and peer debriefings. Ethical clearance was obtained from the lead researcher's institution, with informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity maintained in line with qualitative research ethics (Cohen et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Immersion Model in Language Learning

The immersion model, which permeates every aspect of instruction and daily campus life, has repeatedly been shown to enhance communicative competence across varied educational settings (De Jong, 2016). Initially developed in Canada during the late 1960s to improve French proficiency among English-speaking learners (Mady, 2015), immersion employs the target language not merely as an object of study but as the primary medium for learning and interaction in both formal and informal contexts (Christoffersen, 2017). This naturalistic approach provides abundant comprehensible input, aligning with Krashen's Input Hypothesis that effective language acquisition occurs when learners receive material

slightly above their current proficiency (Spada & Lightbown, 2019). Variants of this model include full immersion (target language dominates all instruction), partial immersion (used for some subjects), and late immersion (introduced at higher educational levels) (Chen, 2019).

Empirical evidence confirms the effectiveness of immersion: Luan and Guo found that students in English immersion programs in North China outperformed peers in speaking and writing, and expressed more positive language attitudes (Luan & Guo, 2011). In another context, Johnson reported greater fluency—indicated by faster speech and fewer errors—among immersion learners, highlighting the importance of teacher expertise in sustaining these gains (Johnson, 2022). Within Arabic immersion programs, Abdurahman et al. showed that dormitory-based models led to improved motivation and communication skills, though they also introduced considerable psychosocial stress (Abdurahman et al., 2018). Complementing this, Pamungkas et al noted a shift from grammatical focus to habitual language use, which supported improved pronunciation and cultural integration (Pamungkas et al., 2024).

Despite these performance-driven findings, a critical gap remains in understanding learners' subjective experiences within immersive environments. Neubauer et al advocate for phenomenological methods—such as bracketing and reflexivity—as essential tools for capturing the depth of these experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019b). This study addresses that gap by combining insights from both quantitative achievement research and deep experiential inquiry to examine not just what immersion accomplishes, but how and why it influences learning across Indonesian Islamic educational contexts.
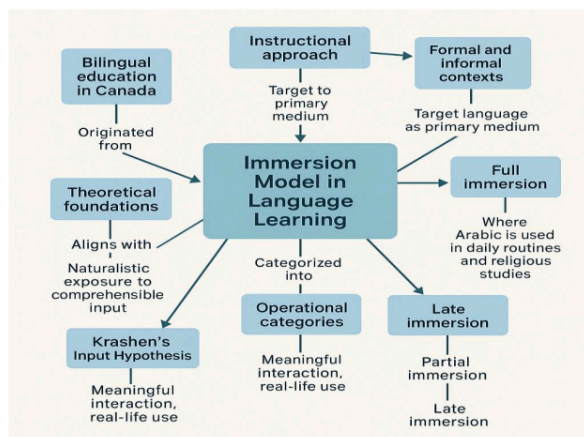

Figure 1. Immersion Model in Language Learning

The figure presents a structured overview of the Immersion Model in Language Learning, which originated from bilingual education systems in Canada and has since been adapted across various contexts, including Islamic higher education. The foundation of this model lies in the integration of key theoretical frameworks—most notably Krashen's Input

Hypothesis, which emphasizes the necessity of exposing learners to comprehensible input just beyond their current linguistic competence to promote subconscious language acquisition (Wulf, 2021). This principle aligns with the Natural Approach, which advocates for learning in low-stress environments through meaningful input rather than explicit grammar instruction. These concepts converge in immersion learning, where language acquisition occurs in authentic communicative contexts, fostering both fluency and learner autonomy (Ye, 2024). The diagram visually reinforces this by centering meaningful interaction and real-life use as operational pillars of the immersion model.

Building upon these foundations, the model incorporates pedagogical theories such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and immersion typologies, including full and partial immersion. CLT highlights the role of authentic interaction and negotiation of meaning in developing communicative competence (Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024), while immersion typologies, first categorized by Lambert, differentiate between full immersion where the target language is used across instructional and non-instructional settings—and late or partial immersion, which introduces the target language progressively based on learners' readiness (Maryani et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Indonesia, these models are localized to meet religious and academic goals. Arabic, as both a sacred and scholarly language, is integrated not only in formal classroom instruction but also in dormitory conversations, rituals, and extracurricular settings, an approach that enhances pragmatic fluency and strengthens identity through language (Zein, 2020).

The diagram also emphasizes the dynamic interplay between instructional approaches and the learning context, both formal and informal. Instructionally, the target language (Arabic) is positioned as the primary medium, echoing the structure of Canadian immersion schools, where subject matter is taught directly in the second language (Genesee, 1987). Informal contexts—such as daily interactions, religious discussions, and communal activities—further reinforce language use through contextual authenticity. Cummins (1998) affirms that such environments not only bolster second language proficiency but do so without compromising first language development. Ultimately, the model proposes a context-sensitive immersion framework that fosters linguistic competence, religious literacy, and cultural authenticity, making it particularly suited for Arabic language education in Islamic institutions.

Arabic Immersion Program Models at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, University of Darussalam Gontor, and Ar-Raayah College of Arabic Language Sukabumi

In Indonesia's Islamic higher education landscape, Arabic holds a pivotal role not only as a vehicle for comprehending classical Islamic texts but also as a medium for academic inquiry and global Islamic discourse. Despite decades of Arabic instruction, however, many institutions continue to face challenges in cultivating active Arabic proficiency, especially in speaking and listening. These limitations have prompted educators to explore alternative pedagogical frameworks, including the immersion approach, which aligns with the need for communicative and functional Arabic use on campus (Almelhes, 2024).

Field data from three institutions, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Darussalam Gontor University, and Ar-Raayah College of Arabic Language, demonstrate varied adaptations of the immersion model. In Gontor, full immersion is deeply embedded in the pesantren lifestyle,

creating a consistent linguistic environment. In contrast, UIN Sunan Kalijaga implements a partial immersion model, where Arabic is used selectively in classes and institutional programs. Ar-Raayah College of Arabic Language adopts an intensive immersion model for new students through a semester-long Arabic-only program. These distinctions reflect institutional philosophies and resource capacities, but all aim to overcome the same linguistic inertia.

Notably, student perspectives as revealed through in-depth interviews illustrate how immersion fosters greater confidence, fluency, and a sense of identity as Arabic speakers. One student from Ar-Raayah shared, *"Using Arabic every day felt awkward at first, but after two months, I started to dream in Arabic."* Another student at UIN Sunan Kalijaga explained, *"Although it's not full immersion, being forced to speak Arabic in certain classes helped me organize my thoughts better."* These testimonies confirm Krashen's assertion that affective filters such as anxiety and motivation are key to language acquisition (Hassan, 2022). The structured yet supportive immersion environment helps lower these filters.

From a comparative analysis, each model presents its strengths and limitations. Full immersion provides more consistent input but may be overwhelming without proper scaffolding. Partial immersion offers flexibility but may lack sustained exposure. Intensive immersion is time-bound yet impactful, especially when combined with cultural and religious relevance. These findings suggest that a hybrid model combining structured input, meaningful interaction, and student agency might be optimal for the Indonesian IHEI context.

A closer examination of the immersion models implemented at the three institutions reveals nuanced variations in design, institutional commitment, and pedagogical depth. At UIN Sunan Kalijaga, the partial immersion model is integrated into the dormitory program for new students, particularly those enrolled in the Arabic Language Education department. Through a semester-long language camp, students are expected to engage in daily Arabic communication, thematic vocabulary exercises, and structured speaking practices such as *khitabah* and group discussions. However, based on observational data and interviews with dormitory supervisors, the program faces significant limitations, namely, inconsistent supervision, limited lecturer involvement, and declining student motivation. These factors hinder the development of a truly immersive linguistic environment, despite good intentions in program design.

In contrast, Darussalam Gontor University presents a full immersion model that is deeply embedded within its pesantren culture. Arabic is mandated as the primary language of communication across all domains, academic, social, and administrative. This requirement is supported by a comprehensive institutional framework that includes disciplinary mechanisms such as the *language court*, which enforces compliance among students. Faculty members, many of whom are graduates from Middle Eastern institutions, contribute to an authentic Arabic-speaking atmosphere. Observations suggest that Gontor's model not only enhances students' linguistic proficiency but also strengthens character education through structured routine, communal living, and disciplined practice.

Meanwhile, the Ar-Raayah Institute of Arabic Language Studies adopts an intensive immersion model within a full-time *ma'had* (boarding school) setting. The program mandates exclusive use of Arabic on campus, and students are closely monitored in dormitories to ensure active engagement in Arabic dialogue. The curriculum includes daily *muhadatsah*,

language drills, and competitions that stimulate both linguistic and cultural immersion. Interviews with instructors and documentation highlight the role of native Arabic-speaking teachers and the use of gamified learning environments, such as inter-dorm contests, in reinforcing motivation and sustained language use. The model not only aims at skill mastery but also emphasizes acculturation into Arabic linguistic norms and thought patterns.

These institutional case studies, when juxtaposed with the student testimonies and theoretical frameworks discussed earlier, underscore the complex interplay between pedagogical structure, affective support, and institutional culture in shaping the success of immersion models. While UIN Sunan Kalijaga's partial model offers practical entry points for large-scale institutions with limited Arabic infrastructure, Gontor's total immersion exemplifies an ideal of linguistic totality intertwined with character formation. Ar-Raayah's intensive approach demonstrates how focused, time-bound programs can yield rapid linguistic gains when supported by consistency and competitive learning dynamics. Taken together, these insights reaffirm the importance of designing contextualized hybrid immersion frameworks that balance input, structure, and socio-affective factors to cultivate communicative Arabic competence in Islamic higher education effectively.

Table 1. Analysis of Arabic Immersion Program Models

Aspect	UIN Sunan Kalijaga	UNIDA Gontor	STIBA Ar-Raayah Sukabumi
Type of Immersion	Partial	Total (comprehensive)	Intensive (boarding-based environment)
Duration & Location	One semester in a student dormitory	Throughout the study period across the entire campus	Throughout the study period in the dormitory (*ma'had*) environment
Language in Daily Activities	Encouraged but inconsistent	Mandatory, with strict control (*language court*)	Mandatory, monitored by language supervisors
Supporting Activities	Speech practice, discussions, and daily vocabulary use	Public speaking, debates, drama, and language forums	Daily conversations (*muhadatsah*), drills, and language contests
Teachers & Supervisors	Internal lecturers; not all apply immersion	Instructors graduated from the Middle East and are alumni of the pesantren	Internal lecturers, including native Arabic speakers
Environmental Control	Limited to certain times and places	Very strong and binding; part of campus culture	Strict, based on supervision and environmental motivation
Additional Objectives	Enhancing active language skills	Character building and language discipline	Strengthening Arabic-based academic culture
Challenges	Student motivation, lecturer consistency	Discipline enforcement, adaptation of new students	Limited resources, student burnout in later years

The comparative table presents an analytical overview of Arabic immersion models across three prominent Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia: UIN Sunan Kalijaga, UNIDA Gontor, and STIBA Ar-Raayah Sukabumi. Each institution implements a distinct model reflecting varying degrees of immersion intensity, institutional control, and educational objectives. UIN Sunan Kalijaga applies a partial immersion model limited to one

semester in a student dormitory. Arabic usage is encouraged but inconsistently practiced outside of structured learning, with speech practices and discussions serving as the primary supporting activities. The program is challenged by inconsistent lecturer engagement and low student motivation, reflecting a need for stronger institutional commitment and cultural reinforcement.

In contrast, UNIDA Gontor applies a total immersion model deeply embedded into the entire academic and social life of the campus. Arabic is mandatory across all settings and strictly enforced through mechanisms such as the "language court." The program integrates public speaking, debates, and language forums to maintain student engagement, supported by instructors who are alumni of pesantren and Middle Eastern institutions. Meanwhile, STIBA Ar-Raayah Sukabumi offers an intensive, boarding-based model where Arabic is consistently enforced in both academic and dormitory settings through daily muḥādatsah, language drills, and contests. While Ar-Raayah benefits from the presence of native-speaking instructors and a highly immersive environment, it faces resource limitations and risks of student fatigue. Overall, the table underscores how institutional philosophy, environmental control, and staffing determine the success and sustainability of immersion-based Arabic instruction.

Teaching Methods and Immersion-Based Learning Environments in Three Indonesian Islamic Institutions

The implementation of Arabic language immersion across Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia exhibits a spectrum of pedagogical and environmental models, each shaped by distinct institutional cultures and learning philosophies. At UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, the immersion program adopts a semi-formal framework embedded within a language camp system for first-year students. Instructional strategies combine thematic vocabulary enrichment, scripted speech (*khitābah*) training, and interactive small-group tasks such as debates. While formal instruction predominantly uses Bahasa Indonesia, the immersion component is situated in dormitory life, where Arabic is encouraged in daily interactions such as mealtime conversations, casual greetings, and group activities. The environment is linguistically enriched through visual aids (e.g., "word walls") and reflective peer sessions, though reinforcement largely depends on students' intrinsic motivation and periodic oversight from dorm supervisors. This approach aligns with partial immersion models where language use is situated in authentic, socially relevant contexts.

In contrast, Darussalam Gontor University adopts a strict and total immersion model, in which Arabic is mandated in all formal, informal, and extracurricular domains. The institution enforces this immersion through systematic policies, including language courts, which monitor compliance and impose corrective tasks such as vocabulary journals or spontaneous oral presentations. Faculty and dorm supervisors consistently model the use of Arabic, and native speakers are incorporated as mentors to provide scaffolding in both academic and casual settings. Pedagogically, the approach merges the direct method—where grammatical structures are taught through demonstration and repetition—with task-based learning, including drama, debate, and public speaking competitions. This comprehensive immersion paradigm is designed to develop linguistic fluency while also cultivating identity and discipline through full language enculturation, in line with communicative competence frameworks.

At the Ar-Raayah College of Arabic Language in Sukabumi, the model reflects an intensive, boarding-based immersion environment. Arabic serves as the medium of communication across academic and non-academic settings within the ma'had (residential institute). The instructional design includes daily muḥādatsah (guided conversations), integrated listening modules using authentic Arabic media, and informal assessments embedded into everyday routines, such as Arabic-only roll calls. Instructors, many of whom are native Arabic speakers, alternate between formal classroom teaching and informal language patrols to ensure consistent usage. The program is further enriched through co-curricular activities such as thematic language festivals, inter-dorm speech contests, and student-led halaqah (study circles). These design elements foster both pragmatic fluency and cultural immersion, supporting the constructivist principle that language learning is most effective when it is socially negotiated and experientially grounded.

Students' experiences across these institutions reveal varying levels of engagement, challenge, and adaptation. At UIN Sunan Kalijaga, the immersion experience is mediated by students' willingness to participate beyond the classroom. While some achieve conversational proficiency and cultural confidence, others report difficulty sustaining Arabic use due to limited reinforcement outside structured activities. Conversely, students at Gontor often undergo a transformational linguistic shift, citing a deeper internalization of Arabic not merely as an academic subject but as a way of life, a phenomenon consistent with second language identity Theory. At Ar-Raayah, the immersive design is praised for its cultural authenticity and community cohesion, though some learners report feelings of linguistic fatigue. Nevertheless, the institution's holistic approach appears to balance intensity with support, contributing to high levels of communicative competence.

Discussion

The comparative analysis across UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Darussalam Gontor University, and Ar Raayah Sukabumi illustrates that immersive learning environments, when intentionally structured, significantly support Arabic proficiency, consistent with findings from Nasirudeen, who reported strong gains in speaking and listening skills through immersion-based programs (Nasirudeen, 2024). Specifically, UIN's partial immersion model offers valuable informal exposure but suffers from inconsistent reinforcement due to limited supervision and motivational variability. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that learner autonomy and perceived competence are crucial for sustained engagement. Without systematic scaffolding—such as persistent monitoring or embedded academic integration—the motivators to develop proficiency remain situational rather than internalized.

In contrast, Darussalam Gontor's total immersion approach—mandating Arabic across all settings—mirrors Schumann's Acculturation Model, where language learning is deeply tied to socio-cultural integration. The institutional mechanisms, including language courts and native-speaker mentors, reduce psychological distance and foster a collective linguistic identity. Nevertheless, adjustment challenges for newcomers suggest that immersion intensity must be balanced with supportive scaffolding, as highlighted in Vollmer's Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, which recognizes the ebb and flow of learner motivation. Meanwhile, Ar Raayah's intensive boarding program offers concentrated immersion with native instructors and dormitory enforcement, leading to accelerated

proficiency. Yet students report burnout—echoing Alqurashi, who found that blended traditional and digital immersion helps sustain motivation (Alqurashi, 2025). These findings collectively confirm that immersion must be systemically supported, motivation-informed, and contextually adaptive to maximize effectiveness and learner well-being.

Table 2. Findings on Arabic Immersion Models

Institution	Characteristics	Focus	Main Challenges	Relevant Theories
UIN Sunan Kalijaga	Partial immersion is primarily integrated into the freshman dormitory	Using Arabic socially	Lack of application in academic settings	Input Hypothesis, Sociocultural Theory
UNIDA Gontor	Total immersion is applied consistently across all aspects of campus life	Natural language use	Adaptation process for new students	Communicative Language Teaching, Zone of Proximal Development
STIBA Ar-Raayah	Intensive immersion model based within the Ma'had, where Arabic is the primary language	Consahlem (Consultation + Helm?) Practice	Overwhelming exposure reported by students	Affective Filter Hypothesis, Experiential Learning

The partial immersion model at UIN Sunan Kalijaga is primarily implemented within the freshman dormitory, where Arabic is encouraged for social interaction but not fully embedded in formal academic settings. This limited scope restricts the transfer of linguistic skills to more cognitively demanding tasks, thereby creating a gap between informal fluency and academic language competence. This scenario aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), which emphasizes that language acquisition requires comprehensible input that is both meaningful and situated across diverse contexts. Additionally, the lack of institutional enforcement and varying levels of student motivation can be interpreted through Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which suggests that social interaction and scaffolding are essential in facilitating second language development, particularly within educational ecosystems.

In contrast, UNIDA Gontor adopts a total immersion model that integrates Arabic across all dimensions of student life, including lectures, dormitories, extracurriculars, and even disciplinary systems. This institutional consistency allows for a naturalized acquisition process, mirroring real-life language use in various domains. Such a model resonates with the core tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the functional use of language in authentic contexts to build communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, the institution faces challenges with incoming students who struggle to adapt to the rigorous Arabic-only environment. This issue corresponds to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein learners benefit most when they are supported just beyond their current capabilities, pointing to the need for structured scaffolding in the early stages of immersion.

At STIBA Ar-Raayah Sukabumi, the intensive immersion model is structured around the Ma'had (boarding environment), where Arabic is strictly used as the primary medium of communication in all academic and social activities. This constant exposure enhances learners' fluency and cultural familiarity but can also lead to psychological fatigue. Some students report feeling overwhelmed by the linguistic demands of their environment, which aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, stating that high anxiety and stress can block language acquisition. The program's emphasis on experience-based learning methods, such as interactive discussions, peer-led sessions, and language competitions, illustrates principles from Experiential Learning Theory, where knowledge emerges through concrete experience and reflective practice.

Each institution embodies a distinct immersion philosophy shaped by its educational culture and student demographic. UIN Sunan Kalijaga prioritizes informal interaction with limited academic integration; UNIDA Gontor mandates full immersion with strict adherence to language policy; and STIBA Ar-Raayah enforces an intensive, controlled environment within a residential framework. These diverse approaches indicate that no single immersion model fits all contexts. Instead, success in immersion programs depends on the alignment between instructional design, learner preparedness, and institutional resources. This finding is consistent with Madkur et al, who argue that flexibility and contextual responsiveness are crucial for effective Arabic immersion programming in Islamic institutions (Madkur et al., 2024).

To enhance immersion effectiveness, institutions must strike a balance between language intensity and learner support systems. Designing adaptive scaffolding, fostering internal motivation, and incorporating culturally relevant content are key to long-term success. Furthermore, differentiated approaches based on students' linguistic readiness, as well as clear academic and social objectives, are vital. Future research should evaluate these models longitudinally by measuring student outcomes in speaking, listening, academic reading, and cultural engagement, providing a more robust framework for the evolution of Arabic immersion in higher Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Arabic language immersion programs implemented at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, UNIDA Gontor, and STIBA Ar-Raayah Sukabumi reflect three distinct institutional models with varied impacts on students' linguistic competence and affective development. The partial immersion approach at UIN Sunan Kalijaga offers foundational exposure but lacks full integration into academic routines, limiting students' progress in formal language use. In contrast, UNIDA Gontor's total immersion model supports deep linguistic internalization and identity formation through a cohesive, Arabic-only environment, though it presents initial adjustment challenges for new learners. Meanwhile, STIBA Ar-Raayah's intensive boarding-based model successfully accelerates fluency in communicative Arabic, but its continuous exposure can cause psychological fatigue. These findings underscore that no singular model fits all contexts; effectiveness depends on institutional support, learner readiness, and the alignment of language use across academic and social domains.

The study's analysis, informed by Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory,

demonstrates that immersion programs thrive when combining comprehensible input with emotionally supportive, interaction-rich environments. Accordingly, Islamic higher education institutions are encouraged to implement adaptive, data-driven strategies, such as embedding immersion across curricular and extracurricular activities, training faculty in communicative and identity-oriented pedagogy, and designing structured, affective scaffolding. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to assess not only language proficiency outcomes but also changes in students' confidence, motivation, and identity as Arabic users. Ultimately, immersion should be positioned not merely as a teaching method but as a holistic ecosystem of language socialization in the Islamic academic context.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

The author was solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection through interviews and observations at the three selected institutions, data analysis using phenomenological methods, and the interpretation of findings. The author also prepared, reviewed, and approved the final manuscript. All aspects of the research, from fieldwork to writing, were independently conducted to ensure the integrity and originality of the study.

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