Thematic Stagnation and Methodological Conservatism in Arabic Language Education Master's Theses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga: A Mixed-Methods Content Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – This study maps thematic stagnation and methodological conservatism in master's theses in Arabic Language Education (PBA) at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga (2015–2021) and the intellectual dynamics of topic–method choices to inform program evaluation and policy.

Methods/Design/Approach – A descriptive design with a historical approach and a mixed-methods strategy was applied to the full corpus of 178 theses (total sampling, 2015–2021). Data were gathered via documentation/bibliographic survey of digital and physical archives and analysed using content analysis and frequency distributions ($P = (F/N) \times 100$). The study complied with institutional research ethics and received ethics committee approval.

Findings – Six themes were identified; teaching–learning components dominate 50% (89/178) with teaching materials as the largest subtheme 22.5% (40/178). Linguistics appears consistently yet remains minor 14.6%; educational technology 7.9% increased in 2019–2021, while maharah declined 4.5%. Methods are led by R&D 27.5% (49), activity analysis 24.7% (44), literature review 17.4% (31); experiments 5.6% (10) rose in the last two years.

Originality/Value – Program-level thematic–methodological mapping pinpoints where stagnation occurs while signalling shifts (technology and experiments), guiding a move toward more explanatory, cross-level, and interdisciplinary designs grounded in a thematic lens attentive to diglossia.

Practical Implications – Three operational steps are recommended: (i) redesign the research roadmap (applied sociolinguistics, policy/curriculum evaluation, multicultural agendas); (ii) strengthen methodological capability (causal/explanatory designs, mixed methods, program evaluation) to buttress R&D; (iii) orchestrate cross-disciplinary collaborations and field partnerships.

Keywords Arabic Language Education (PBA), thesis mapping, research themes, research methods, Indonesia

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In higher education—particularly within Arabic Language Education (PBA) programs—the production of scholarly writing is a core academic activity for both faculty and students (Hammann, 2005; Huang, 2010). Faculty members are required to conduct and report research regularly, while undergraduate and graduate students produce academic papers culminating in theses or dissertations. At the Master's PBA program of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, a thesis is mandatory for graduation. Nevertheless, thematic stagnation has emerged: topics and methods are often repetitive, dominated by development studies and classroom-based research, with limited engagement with contemporary societal issues (Azizy, 2005; Maksudin, 2019).

Prior evidence substantiates this picture. A review of 98 theses at IAIN Surakarta observed few works addressing current issues in Arabic language education (Ghofur, 2017). Based on 611 theses at PBA Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, a strong emphasis on teaching methods with limited intellectual-conceptual breadth was noted (Wahab, 2015). Content analyses of Sinta-2 accredited national journals reveal the scarcity of integrative thinking and the need for inter-/multidisciplinary approaches (Fauzi, 2021). A survey of universities in Central Java and Yogyakarta identified three major clusters (Arabic studies, language skills, and linguistic studies), with experimental, comparative, and descriptive designs most prevalent (Setiawan, 2021). Overall, the field appears narrow in focus, repetitive, and methodologically conservative.

Concurrently, recent literature signals directions for renewal. A thematic approach to teaching Arabic has been shown to significantly improve academic achievement through a quasi-experimental pre-/post-test design with ANCOVA confirming robust treatment effects (Shamsoddini Fard & Aslam Raisi, 2023). This suggests that thematic orientation is not only a pedagogical technique but also a conceptual lens that can inform problem formulation and topic selection in Arabic language education research.

Sociolinguistic structure matters as well. Arabic diglossia—i.e., the gap between standard and vernacular varieties—directly affects educational quality, literacy, and learners' linguistic self-confidence (Maamouri, 1998). For PBA research, this implies moving beyond classroom technique to account for structural language factors mediating Arabic literacy in Indonesia.

Within Islamic studies, the development of thematic Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia has been mapped, documenting shifts in authority (from traditional mufassir to cross-disciplinary scholars) and methodology (editorial framing, verse selection, and interpretive tendencies) (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024). These shifts parallel what PBA research requires: thematic and interdisciplinary approaches that connect text to social reality, offering methodological lessons for innovating thesis topics.

More broadly, the Indonesian educational landscape calls for multicultural responsiveness. A systematic review and expert interviews underscore the urgency of inclusive curricula, teacher training, and community engagement to foster tolerance and social cohesion (Mariyono, 2024). For PBA, such a framework motivates research themes responsive to cultural diversity and local needs, enhancing the social impact of scholarly work (Fauzi, 2021; Setiawan, 2021).

Taken together, two gaps become evident: (i) a knowledge gap from repetitive themes that under-address contemporary societal issues, and (ii) a methodological gap marked by reliance on experimental/comparative/descriptive designs without integrative, interdisciplinary approaches (Fauzi, 2021; Ghofur, 2017; Setiawan, 2021; Wahab, 2015). Adopting a thematic lens (Shamsoddini Fard & Aslam Raisi, 2023) that is attentive to diglossia (Maamouri, 1998), cross-disciplinary methodological dynamics (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024), and multicultural orientations (Mariyono, 2024) offers a strategic path to broaden PBA research in Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study addresses thematic stagnation and methodological conservatism in theses produced by Master's students in the PBA program at Universitas

Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta by mapping their intellectual dynamics in topic and method selection. The research questions are:

1. What are the trends in study themes chosen by Master's students in the PBA program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga?
2. What intellectual dynamics are present in the Master's PBA program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga?

The findings aim to inform program evaluation and policy decisions and to catalyze innovation in topics and methods that align Arabic language education research with societal needs.

2.   Methods

This study combines qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the intellectual dynamics of master's students in Arabic Language Education (PBA) at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. We employ a descriptive design with a historical approach to analyse the themes and research methods found in theses.

Population and sampling. The population comprises all master's theses in PBA published during 2015–2021 (N = 178). Total sampling was used to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Data were obtained through documentation with a bibliographic survey, recording each thesis's topic, research method, and key findings. Sources were accessed through the digital and physical thesis archives of the university library. We applied content analysis to identify major themes, patterns, and trends, complemented by frequency distributions to provide quantitative context. The percentage formula used was:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} X\ 100$$

Where PP is the percentage, FF the frequency, and NN the number of cases.

The study adhered to institutional research ethics; all data were drawn from publicly accessible theses with no personal or sensitive information. Ethics committee approval was obtained, and all procedures followed applicable ethical principles.

These procedures yielded a conceptual map of Arabic language education studies and a methodological map of approaches used in PBA master's theses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, offering a reference to enrich future thesis work.

3.   Results

3.1 Overview of Arabic Education Research Fields

Learning Arabic has an essential role for the nations of the world. So learning Arabic becomes an ability and is considered a vital science to learn. The science of learning Arabic in its application is supported by various other linguistics, such as phonology, semantics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, Arabic learning methodology, contrastive analysis, error analysis, and language tests (Ismail Muhammad, 2012)

Substantively, the study of Arabic language education covers two significant themes: Ilm al-Tarbiyah (the science of education) and ilm al-Lughah at-Tathbiqy (the Science of Applied Language) (Wahab, 2015) Meanwhile, in terms of its existence, the study of Arabic language education is divided into two clusters: the normative study of Arabic language education and the applicative study of Arabic language education (Ghofur, 2017)

The study of the provisions or philosophical conceptions of procedures, patterns, evaluations, and forms of Arabic teaching is part of the normative study of Arabic language

education. Study in the book is the name given to this normative cluster. Meanwhile, the Arabic language education study cluster is a study book that intersects with Arabic language education and is closely related to social and social realities (Ghofur, 2017)

Meanwhile, Zakiyah Arifah, through her research, revealed that there are three major themes in the study of Arabic language education, namely ilm al-Ta'lim (the science of teaching), al-Maharat al-Lughawiyyah (language skills), and 'Anashir al-Lughah (elements of teaching). These three things then gave birth to various variants of the major themes of Arabic education studies as follows (Arifa & Al Faruq, 2021):

Table 1. Arabic Study Map

ilm al-Ta'lim (the science of teaching)	al-Maharat al-Lughawiyyah (Language Skills)	'Anashir al-Lughah (Element of Teaching)
Curriculum	Istima' (Listening)	Phonology
Teaching Materials	Kalam (Speaking)	Mufrodat
Learning Methods	Qira'ah (Reading)	Shorof
Learning Media	Kitabah (Writing)	Nahwu (Gramatics)
Evaluation		Semantics

It differs from Muhbib, who mapped the study of Arabic into two major themes, namely the linguistic and literary themes (Wahab, 2015) Furthermore, when the study of Arabic meets "ilm tarbiyah" and "ilm al-lughah al-tathbiqi" it will give birth to many branches of the Arabic language. If applied to the Arabic language learning curriculum, it will give birth to hiwar, qowaid, muthola'ah, mufrodat, insya', imla', mahfudzot, and balaghoh (Al-Gholayaini, 1994) Then if it is divided according to skill, it can be divided into Kalam, Istima', Qira'ah, and Kitabah. Moreover, suppose it is associated with other sciences. In that case, it will give birth to necessary studies such as Arabic language teaching methodology, Arabic language teaching media, Arabic language teaching technology, Arabic education evaluation system, and others (Wahab, 2015)

So it can be concluded that the various variants of the study of Arabic language education in a more complex manner, according to Muhbib Abdul Wahab, are as follows:(Wahab, 2015)

1) Furu' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 2) Maharat al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 3) Arabic Language Teaching Materials, 4) Curriculum, Approaches, and methods, 5) Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, and Utilization of Technology/Media 6) PBA system and development, 7) Arabic Language Teaching Institution Studies, 8) Arabic Language Character Studies, 9) Arabic Language Development Studies, 10) Text Studies

Mapping the areas of Arabic studies as follows (Setiawan, 2021):

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                                                          ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │    phonology     │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                                                          ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │      Shorf       │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                                          ┌───────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
                                          │  Arabic   │───│      Nahwu        │
                                          │  Theory   │   └──────────────────┘
                                          └───────────┘   ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │    Semantics     │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                                                          ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │    Balaghah      │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                             ┌──────────┐                 ┌──────────────────┐
                             │  Arabic  │                 │ Psycholinguistics│
                             │ Language │                 └──────────────────┘
                             │ Studies  │                 ┌──────────────────┐
                             └──────────┘                 │ Sociolinguistics │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                                                          ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │   Linguistics    │
                                          ┌───────────┐   └──────────────────┘
                                          │  Applied  │   ┌──────────────────┐
                                          │  Arabic   │───│   Contrastive    │
                                          └───────────┘   │   Linguistics    │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                                                          ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │    Dictionary    │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
                                                          ┌──────────────────┐
                                                          │    Translate     │
                                                          └──────────────────┘
 ┌─────────────┐           ┌──────────┐  ┌───────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
 │  Field of   │           │ Maharah  │  │  Istima'  │   │    Language      │
 │  Study of   │───────────│Lughawiyah│  └───────────┘   │    Education     │
 │   Arabic    │           └──────────┘  ┌───────────┐   └──────────────────┘
 │  Language   │                         │   Kalam   │
 │  Education  │                         └───────────┘
 └─────────────┘                         ┌───────────┐
                                         │  Qira'ah  │
                                         └───────────┘
                                         ┌───────────┐
                                         │  Kitabah  │
                                         └───────────┘
                             ┌──────────┐ ┌───────────┐
                             │  Arabic  │ │Curriculum │
                             │ Learning │ └───────────┘
                             └──────────┘ ┌───────────┐
                                          │  Matter   │
                                          └───────────┘
                                          ┌───────────┐
                                          │  Method   │
                                          └───────────┘
                                          ┌───────────┐
                                          │   Media   │
                                          └───────────┘
                                          ┌───────────┐
                                          │Evaluation │
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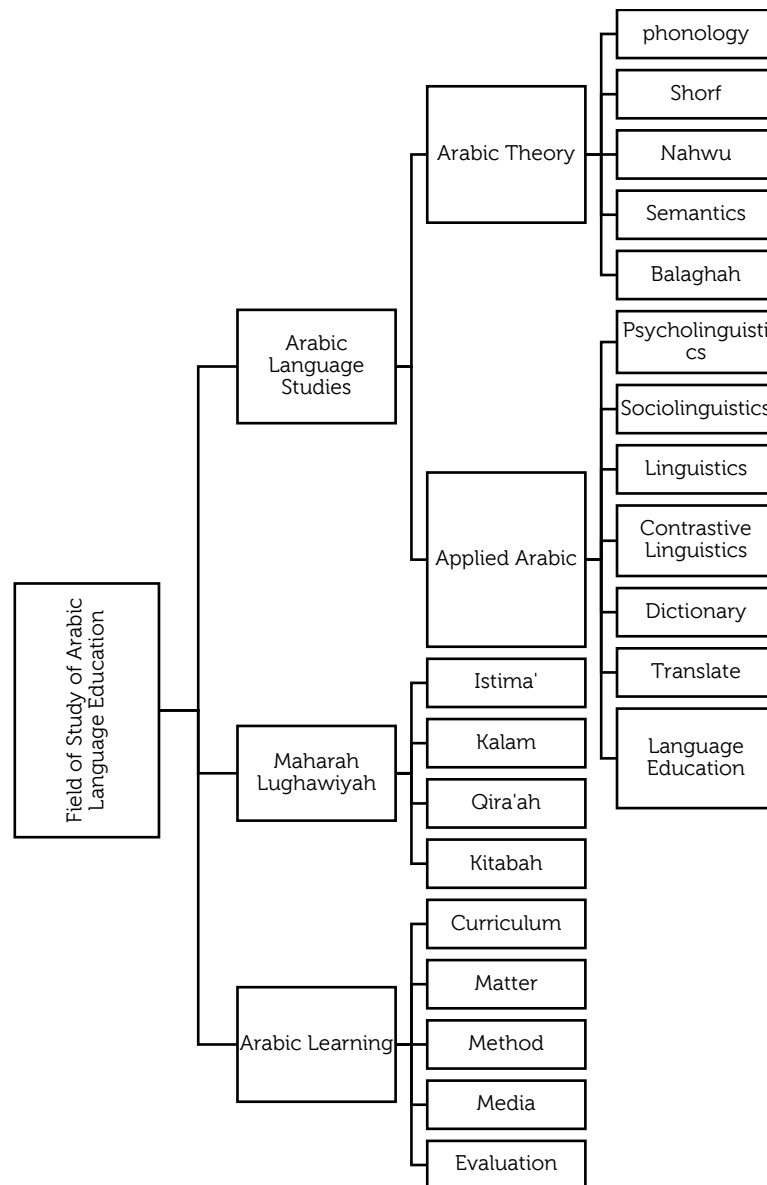
Figure 1. Map of Arabic Studies According to Setiawan (2021)

From these differences, the researcher concludes that the fields of study in Arabic Language Education are as follows:

Table 2. Arabic Language Education Studies

Arabic Language Education Studies	Arabic Language Studies	theoretical	• Phonology • Nahwu • Shorof	• Balaghah • Mufrodat • Semantics
		Applied	• Linguistics • Psycholinguistic • Sociolinguistics	• Psykosociolinguistics • Dictionary • Translate

	Maharat	• Isitima • Kalam	• Qira'ah • Kitabah
	Arabic Teaching and Learning	• teaching materials • Method • Model • Strategy	• Evaluation • Matter • Teacher Competence • Teacher Competence
	PBA System and Policy	• Curriculum • PBA Policy • PBA Program	• Program Evaluation • PBA Management
	Arabic Learning Technology		
	Arabic Education Thought and Research		

According to the researchers, the division of the research methodology is as follows:

1. According to Whitney, the division of research methods are: a) Descriptive Method, b) Historical Method, c) Experimental method, d) Philosophical Method, e) Predictive Method, f) Social Method, and g) Creative method. (Douidri, 2005)
2. Muhammad Tal'at Isa divided the research methods into a) Case Study Methods, b) Social Surveys. c) Statistical Methods, d) Experimental Methods, e) Historical Methods, f) Comparative Methods (Isa, 1963)
3. Abdurrahman Badawi, a) Inductive Method, b) Experimental Method, and c) Historical Method (Badawi, 1977)
4. Ahmad Badar, a) Historical Method, b) Experimental Method, c) Survey Method, d) Case Study, e) Statistical Method. (Badar, 1984)

Meanwhile, the methodology for studying Arabic education research can be mapped based on the type of research, the type of data and the research orientation, and the place and source of the research data used. The division is as follows (Wahab, 2015):

Table 3. Research Methods according to Wahab (2015)

No	Research Method	Specification
1	Type of Analysis	• Descriptive Analysis • Historical Analysis • Comparative Analysis • Contrastive Analysis • Error Analysis • Content Analysis • Discourse Analysis
2	Types of Data and Research Orientation	• Descriptive • Explorative • Explanative • Experiment • Qualitative • Quantitative
3	Place and Source of Research Data	• Library Research • Field Research

From some of these opinions, the researcher concludes the mapping of research methods as follows:
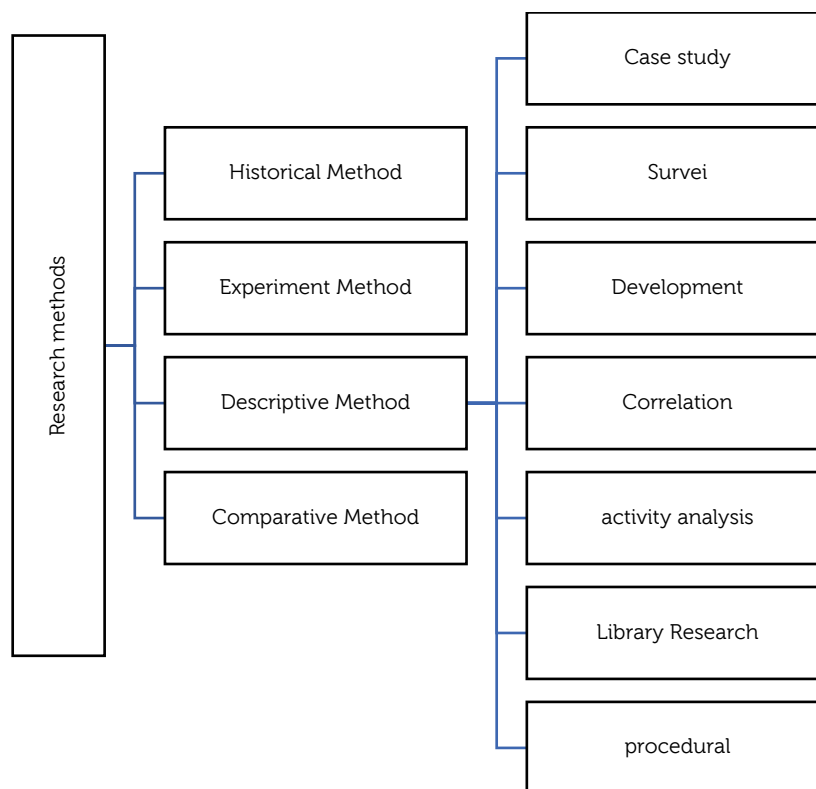
Figure 2. Research Method Map

3.2   *Map of Thesis Study for master's Program in Arabic Language Education Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga*

From the analysis of the theses of the Arabic language education master's program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga from 2015 to 2021, which amounted to 178 theses, it can be concluded that there are six discussion themes. They are: 1) Arabic teaching and learning components, 2) Language Science, 3) PBA policies and systems, 4) Arabic language learning technology, 5) Arabic language research and thought, and 6) Maharah

First, the theme of the components of teaching and learning Arabic includes a study of 1) Teaching Materials, 2) Competence of Arabic Language Teachers, 3) Assessment and evaluation of Arabic Learning, 4) Approaches, 5) Media, 6) Models, 7) Methods, 8) Materials, 9) Learning Problems, and 10) Learning Systems and Designs. Second, the theme of Language Science includes the study of 1) Linguistics, 2) Sociolinguistics, 3) Psycholinguistics, and 4) Psychosociolinguistics. Third, the theme of PBA System and Policy includes studies on 1) Arabic Language Program, 2) Program Evaluation, 3) Arabic Language Curriculum, 4) PBA Policy, and 5) PBA Management. Fourth, the Maharah Study includes 1) the maharah kalam and 2) the study of all maharah (Kalam, Istima ', Qira'ah, and Kitabah). Fifth is the theme of thinking and research on Arabic education, and sixth is the theme of using technology in Arabic education and learning.

From the data obtained by the researcher, it was found that the research studies on the thesis of the PBA master program students of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga from the most significant percentage to the smallest were as follows: Teaching materials 40 theses (22.5%), Curriculum 14 theses (7.9%), Learning Technology 14 theses (7.9%), Learning Methods 10 Theses (5.6%), Learning Media 10 theses (5.6%), Arabic Language Program 9

theses (5.1%), linguistics 8 theses (4 ,5%), psycholinguistics 7 theses (3.9%), assessment and evaluation of learning 7 theses (3.9%), Sociolinguistics 6 theses (3.4%), , maharah kalam 6 theses (3.4%), Arabic thinking 6 theses (3.4%), Learning approach 5 theses (2.8%), Material 5 theses (2.8%), PBA policy 4 theses (2.2%), learning systems and design 4 theses (2.2%), Learning Model 4 theses (2.2%), Arabic Language Program Evaluation 4 theses (2.2%), Psychosociolinguistics 3 thesis (1.7%), PBA Management 3 thesis (1.7%), Translation 2 theses (1.1%), Problematics 2 theses (1.1%), Maharah 2 theses (1.1%), Teaching component n 1 thesis (0.6%), Teacher Competency 1 thesis (0.6%), , Arabic language research 1 thesis (0.6%). That is illustrated in the following diagram:
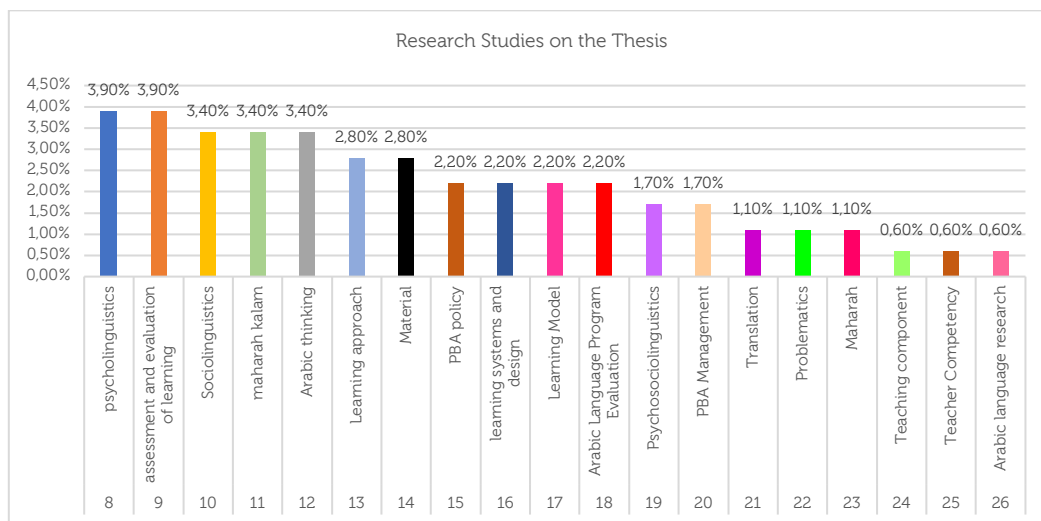
Figure 3. Research Studies on the Thesis

Map of Research Methodology Thesis of Master Program in Arabic Language Education Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga

From the results of the search and analysis of the theses of the Arabic language education master's program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga from 2015 to 2021, which amounted to 178 theses, it can be concluded that, in general, there are ten research methods used, namely: 1) Historical Method, 2) Experimental Method, 3) Case Study, 4) Survey, 5) Development, 6) Correlation Method, 7) Activity Analysis, 8) Literature Study, 9) Procedural, 10) Comparative Method.

From the data found by the researcher, it can be concluded that the research method used in the student thesis of the PBA master's program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, from the most significant percentage to the smallest, is as follows: Development (RnD) 49 theses (27.5%), activity analysis 44 theses (24.7%), literature study 31 theses (17.4%), case study 22 theses (12.4%), experimental method 10 theses (5.6%), comparative method 8 theses (4.5%), correlation method 7 theses (3.9%), survey 5 theses (2.8%), procedural 1 thesis (0.6%), historical method 1 thesis (0.6%).

The following diagram can illustrate this:

Figure 4. The Research Methodology

3.3 Intellectual Dynamics of Students of the Master's Program in Arabic Language Education Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga

In general, of the 178 theses found by researchers, the trend of thesis studies for master's degree students in Arabic education is dominated by studies on teaching and learning components, as many as 89 theses (50%). The trend of studies on teaching and learning components dominated in 2016, 2019, 2020, and 2021. Next is studying Arabic language learning systems and policies with 34 theses (19.1%). This study dominated in 2015 and 2017.

The study of linguistics was studied in 26 theses (14.6%), but this study of linguistics is the most consistent study theme, and there are always those who study it every year, although it does not dominate. Namely 2015 (17.6%), 2016 (27.3%), 2017 (7.7%), 2018 (20%), 2019 (8.2%), 2020 (22.7%), and 2021 (8.8%).

Then, the theme of educational technology and Arabic language learning was examined in 14 theses (7.9%). This study was reviewed in 2015 (5.9%), 2017 (23.1%), 2019 (2%), 2020 (9.1%), 2021 (20.6%). Quantitatively, studies on learning technology will be the most studied in 2021, with seven theses. However, the highest percentage was in 2017 with 23.1%. These data show that the theme of learning technology has always been discussed in the last three years (2019, 2020, 2021). Technology studies were discussed in 10 out of 14 theses from those three years. That shows that the trend of studies on Arabic learning technology is increasing.

Furthermore, the study of maharah was studied in 8 student theses (4.5%). Namely, in 2015 1 thesis (5.9%), 2016 2 theses (6.1%), 2018 3 theses (30%), and 2019 2 theses (4.1%). Meanwhile, in 2020 and 2021, there is no specific study on maharah. That shows that the trend of studies on maharah lughawiyah in student theses decreases.

Moreover, lastly is the study of Arabic thought and research. The theme of this study became the study that was at least raised in the thesis of the PBA master program students of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, which was only 7 out of 178 theses (3.9%). This study was first reviewed in 2018 with one thesis (10%), 2019 with one thesis (2%), 2020 with four theses (18.2%), and 2021 with one thesis (2.9%). That shows that the trend of thesis studies on Arabic thought and research does not dominate and fluctuate.
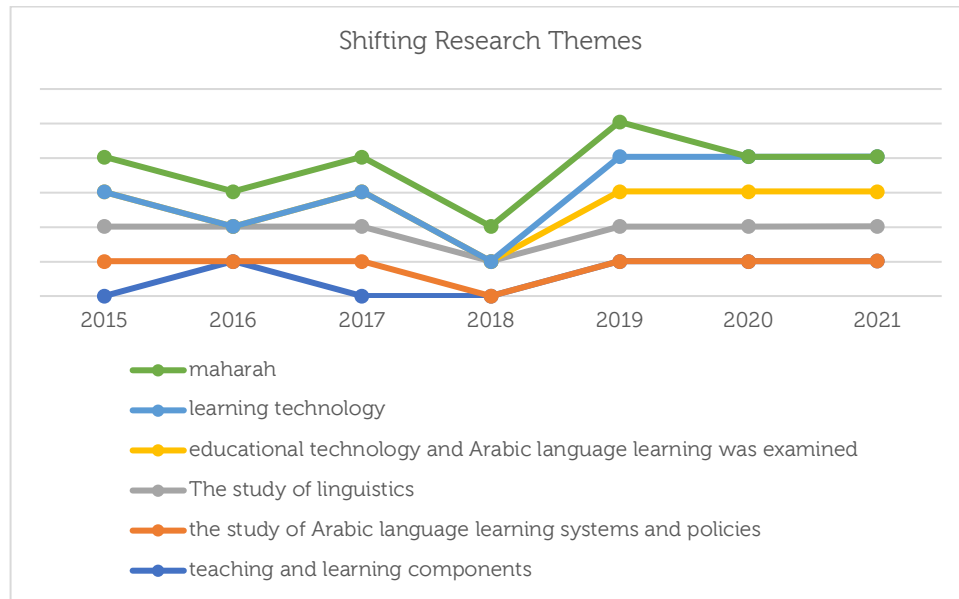
That can be seen in the following graph:

Figure 5. Shifting Research Themes

Regarding the research method used, it was found that the research method on student theses was dominated by research and development methods, which were 49 theses (27.53%). The development method was used in 2016 in as many as 7 theses (21.2%), in 2017 as 5 theses (38.5%), in 2019 as 20 theses (40.8%), in 2020 as many as 5 theses (22.7 %), and 2021 as many as 12 theses (35.3%). Meanwhile, in 2015 and 2018, no theses used the development (R&D) method. However, from these data, it can be concluded that the trend of using the development method tends to fluctuate. Meanwhile, in the last year (2021), there was an increase from the previous year (2020).

The second most widely used method is the activity analysis method. This method was used in 44 theses (24.72%). This activity analysis method is the most consistent method from 2013 to 2021. The graph of the percentage of use of this activity analysis method tends to fluctuate. The highest percentage was in 2018, which reached 80% (8 theses).

The literature study method was used in 31 student theses (17.42%). From the analysis results, the literature study method began to be used in the 2015 thesis and continued until 2021. The percentage of the literature study method used was the most widely used in 2020, which was 40.9% (9 out of 22 theses). Overall, the percentage graph shows that the use of the literature study method tends to increase. In 2021, the literature study method slightly decreased the percentage of users from the previous year (2020).

While the case study method was used in 22 theses (12.36%), the case study method was found in all years except 2018. The case study method dominated the research method in 2016, with as many as nine theses out of 33 theses (27.3%). If it is based on a percentage, the trend of using the case study method can be said to have decreased.

The experimental method was used in 10 student theses (5.62%). Experimental methods were found in the 2016 thesis, as many as 2 of 33 theses (6.1%). Meanwhile, the percentage graph shows that the trend of using experimental methods tends to increase, especially in the last two years, namely 4.5% in 2020 and 8.8% in 2021.

That is in contrast to the comparative method, which experienced a downward trend. The comparative method was used in 8 theses out of 178 students (4.49%). It can be seen that in the last five years, there have only been two theses using the comparative method. Even in the last two years, no theses used the comparative method.

The correlation method was used in 7 student theses from 178 (3.93%). In percentage terms, the trend of using this method tends to fluctuate. Although quantitatively, the number of theses using the correlation method in the last three years is the same, namely

two theses each. At the same time, the methods that were used the least were survey methods with 5 theses (2.81%), procedural methods with 1 thesis (0.56%), and historical methods with 1 thesis (0.56%). In detail, this can be seen in the following graphic:
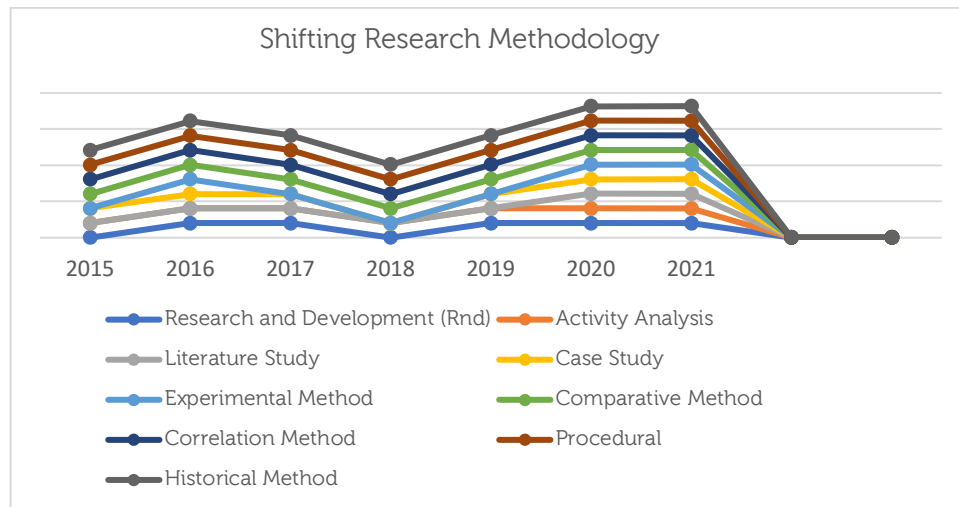

Figure 6. Shifting Research Methodology

4.   Discussion

In line with the research objective—mapping the themes of inquiry and the intellectual dynamics of Arabic Language Education (PBA) theses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, 2015–2021—these findings both affirm and specify the literature's diagnosis of thematic stagnation and methodological conservatism in research on Arabic language education in Indonesia (Azizy, 2005; Fauzi, 2021; Ghofur, 2017; Maksudin, 2019; Setiawan, 2021; Wahab, 2015). The dominance of the topic of "teaching–learning components" and the preference for product-development and descriptive methods reveal a strong classroom praxis orientation. However, the map presented also captures symptoms of a shift: attention to instructional technology strengthened in the last three years of observation, and the use of experimental methods shows an increasing trend. Thus, the results of this study not only confirm the problems previously highlighted, but also identify gaps of transformation that are (beginning to) underway.

The first question—the trend of study themes—is answered by the dominance of studies on teaching–learning components (50%; 89/178) with the largest subtheme "teaching materials" (22,5%; 40 theses). This means that knowledge production tends to focus on the construction of materials, media, approaches, and evaluation, rather than on structural issues of the language or macro policy. Although linguistic studies are present consistently across years, their contribution is relatively minor (14,6%), and the maharah theme actually declines in the final period. On the other hand, the theme of instructional technology increases especially in 2019–2021, signaling adaptation to a learning ecosystem that is increasingly digitalized. The second question—the intellectual dynamics—shows a parallel methodological pattern: Research and Development (R&D) methods (27,5%; 49 theses), activity analysis (24,7%; 44), and literature study (17,4%; 31) dominate; experiments are still small (5,6%; 10) but rise in the last two years; comparative methods and case studies decline. Substantively, this configuration indicates a research ecology that is "product-driven" and "classroom-proximal," while explanatory/causal or cross-level (policy–practice) designs have not yet become mainstream.

These findings align with the mapping of the strong emphasis on teaching methods (Wahab, 2015) as well as with reviews highlighting the narrowness of intellectual breadth and the lack of inter-/multidisciplinary integration (Fauzi, 2021; Ghofur, 2017). Cluster

mapping—language skills, language studies, and teaching studies—is consistent with the six themes in this study, with the "learning components" cluster as the main vortex (Setiawan, 2021). Nevertheless, the increase in the theme of instructional technology in the last three years indicates a response to the need for innovation in line with calls for curricular renewal and inclusive teacher training (Mariyono, 2024). On the other hand, the limited portion of sociolinguistics contrasts with the urgency of the diglossia factor, which directly affects literacy and language confidence (Maamouri, 1998). Likewise, strong evidence of the effectiveness of the "thematic approach" in instruction has not been reflected in the architecture of thesis themes—an indication that "thematic" is more often practiced as a teaching technique than as a conceptual lens for formulating research problems (Shamsoddini Fard & Aslam Raisi, 2023). Furthermore, thematic dynamics and the shifts of authority–methodology in thematic exegesis provide a methodological analogy that has not been much absorbed by PBA research: linking text, context, and social reality through cross-disciplinary framing (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024).

Theoretically, this map affirms that the local PBA research ecosystem still rests on an instrumental–didactic paradigm: knowledge is produced primarily to optimize classroom learning processes through the development of devices (materials, media, models). Consequently, two epistemic gaps keep widening. First, the thematic gap: structural issues (e.g., diglossia, linguistic justice), policy, and cultural diversity have not become the engine of problem formulation. Second, the methodological gap: the dominance of R&D/analytic–descriptive limits the capacity to explain mechanisms, test theory, and assess policy impacts. Adopting a "thematic approach" as a conceptual framework, rather than merely a teaching strategy, opens the possibility of problem formulations that are more problem-driven and society-linked; mainstreaming perspectives of diglossia and multiculturalism enriches the theory of Arabic language acquisition–teaching in the Indonesian context; and integrating cross-disciplinary approaches (e.g., educational psychology, sociolinguistics, policy studies) has the potential to shift research from what works in my class toward why it works, for whom, and under what conditions.

For program administrators and thesis supervisors, these findings signal three operational steps. (1) Redesign the research roadmap: set priority areas beyond learning components—for example applied sociolinguistics (diglossia and literacy), evaluation of PBA curricula/policies, and multicultural themes—without abandoning the traditional strengths in developing teaching devices. (2) Strengthen methodological capabilities: research workshop programs that emphasize causal/explanatory designs, mixed methods, policy analysis, and program evaluation so that R&D is supported by tests of effectiveness and external robustness. (3) Orchestration across disciplines: collaboration schemes with other faculties (psychology, sociology, public policy) and with school/community partners so that thesis topics are grounded in field needs—in line with the agenda of inclusivity and social cohesion (Mariyono, 2024).

This interpretation is limited by (i) the coverage of a single institution within the 2015–2021 span, so cross-context generalization requires caution; (ii) the use of thesis documentary data—without quality assessment or implementation impact—which limits causal inference; and (iii) decisions on the categorization of themes/methods that potentially generate conceptual overlap. In addition, no inter-coder reliability testing was conducted, so the accuracy of proportions is highly dependent on the consistency of the coding process.

Going forward, the research agenda should be expanded through cross-campus and cross-year comparative studies to map regional variation while also capturing post-2021 dynamics. A layered mixed-methods approach—which connects the levels of policy, school, and classroom—needs to be prioritized so that the relationships between the design of PBA policy, instructional practice, and learning outcomes can be empirically bridged. Perspectives of diglossia and multiculturalism also deserve to be mainstreamed in topic formulation, for example by examining how language varieties affect Arabic literacy and the formation of students' linguistic identity. In terms of intervention evaluation, R&D studies need to shift from merely reporting feasibility/practicality toward impact

measurement through experiments or quasi-experiments that report effect parameters transparently. In the realm of meta-research, bibliometric analysis and topic–method network analysis on a corpus of theses or articles can be used to trace streams of ideas, key actors (gatekeepers), and gaps for cross-disciplinary collaboration. In line with that, research on PBA policy and governance—including curriculum, assessment, and program management—needs to be developed with a medium-term program evaluation framework. Finally, the revitalization of maharah studies needs to be firmly tied to the social context through authentic tasks and digital literacy, so that the downward trend can be reversed toward improved quality and relevance of learning. Overall, this study specifies where stagnation occurs and how points of change begin to appear. The agenda ahead demands a shift from products and practices toward problems and mechanisms—with a thematic lens sensitive to diglossia, grounded in interdisciplinarity, and oriented toward multiculturalism—so that PBA research becomes more relevant, resilient, and impactful.

5.   Conclusion

The mapping study of 178 PBA theses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga (2015–2021) affirms the literature's diagnosis of thematic stagnation and methodological conservatism, while simultaneously capturing signs of shift. Knowledge production is centered on "teaching–learning components" (50%; 89/178) with the largest subtheme being teaching materials (22,5%; 40/178). Methodologically, research is dominated by R&D (27,5%; 49/178), activity analysis (24,7%; 44/178), and literature study (17,4%; 31/178), while experiments remain minor (5,6%; 10/178) but tend to increase in the last two years. The theme of instructional technology (7,9%; 14/178) likewise shows an upward trend, whereas maharah tends to decline. These findings affirm a research ecology that is "product-driven" and "classroom-proximal," while marking gaps of transformation toward designs that are more explanatory, cross-level, and networked across disciplines.

The research questions are clearly answered. (1) Trend of study themes: the dominance of studies on teaching–learning components with a consistent but relatively small contribution from linguistics (14,6%) as well as an increase in the technology theme in 2019–2021. (2) Intellectual dynamics: a preference for development and descriptive methods, with a proportional increase in experiments and a decline in comparative/case study in the final period. Thus, the resulting thematic–methodological map provides a comprehensive picture of the position, direction, and speed of change of PBA research in this context.

The practical application of this thematic–methodological map comprises three operational steps that programs and supervisors can immediately adopt: (i) redesign the research roadmap to balance classroom focus with applied sociolinguistics themes (e.g., diglossia and literacy), policy/curriculum evaluation, and multiculturalism; (ii) strengthen methodological capabilities (causal/explanatory designs, mixed methods, program evaluation) so that R&D is supported by tests of effectiveness and external robustness; and (iii) orchestrate cross-disciplinary collaboration and field partnerships so that topics rest on real needs and yield social impact.

The study's limitations should be noted: the coverage of a single institution in 2015–2021 limits generalization; a documentary database without quality/implementation assessment limits causal inference; decisions on the categorization of themes–methods may overlap; and the absence of inter-coder reliability testing. The findings and conclusions should thus be read with contextual caution.

Implications for subsequent research include: (1) comparative expansion across multiple campuses and post-2021; (2) layered mixed designs (policy–school–classroom) to bridge levels of analysis; (3) mainstreaming perspectives of diglossia and multiculturalism in topic formulation; (4) impact evaluation of R&D through (quasi-)experiments with reporting of effect parameters; (5) bibliometrics and topic–method network analysis; (6) policy and governance studies of PBA based on program evaluation; and (7) revitalization of maharah studies that are tied to the social context and digital literacy.

Overall, this study concludes that PBA innovation requires a shift of orientation from products and practices toward problems and mechanisms—through a thematic lens sensitive to diglossia, grounded in interdisciplinarity, and oriented toward multiculturalism—so that research becomes more relevant, resilient, and of greater utility for policymaking and the improvement of instructional quality.

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Author contribution statement
Muhajir: Conceptualization, Methodology; Investigation; Writing – Original Draft.
Muhammad Sya'dullah Fauzi: Formal Analysis; Validation; Visualization; Writing – Review & Editing.
Abdulghani Sultan Alfakih: Supervision; Project Administration; Resources; Writing – Review & Editing.

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Data availability statement
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent
Not applicable. This study analysed publicly available master's theses from Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga and did not involve human participants, animals, or the processing of identifiable personal data.

Declaration of interest statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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