

## CHALLENGES IN ARABIC LANGUAGE SKILL DEVELOPMENT AMONG ISLAMIC STUDIES STUDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM A PUBLIC AND A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH FROM 2020-2026

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### ABSTRACT

Arabic language proficiency is integral to Islamic Studies; however, students in non-Arab contexts often face persistent challenges in developing functional language skills. This study investigates the structural, pedagogical, and institutional challenges affecting Arabic language skill development among Islamic Studies students in Bangladesh, drawing evidence from a comparative case study of one public and one private university from 2020-2026. Adopting a qualitative design, the study utilizes semi-structured in-depth interviews with students, alumni, instructors, and administrators of these two universities, supplemented by document analysis of curricula and institutional policies. The findings identify six interrelated constraints: limited exposure to Arabic in Bengali-medium public universities; an insufficient number of Arabic courses; the predominance of grammar–translation pedagogy; a shortage of Arab-trained instructors; inadequate digital learning infrastructure; and limited co-curricular opportunities for communicative practice. Comparative analysis indicates that the Arabic-medium private university offers relatively greater linguistic immersion; however, structural and pedagogical limitations remain evident in both institutional contexts. The study argues that medium of instruction, teacher qualifications, and institutional commitment to communicative approaches are decisive determinants of language outcomes. Sustainable improvement in Arabic proficiency requires comprehensive curricular reform, expansion of Arabic-medium content courses, targeted professional development, and strengthened technological and institutional support within Islamic Studies programs.

**Keywords:** *Arabic language, Islamic Studies, language acquisition, Bangladesh, pedagogical challenges*

## INTRODUCTION

Arabic occupies a central position in Islamic Studies as the language of the Quran, Hadith, classical jurisprudence, and an enormous treasure trove of Islamic intellectual tradition. Knowledge of the Arabic language is not just an auxiliary one, but it is also a preliminary academic condition for students studying Islamic Studies. In non-Arabic countries like Bangladesh, where Arabic is a foreign or a second language, building sufficient language competence has always been an issue even though it has been adopted as an institution. Islamic Studies programs are supposed to produce students with adequate knowledge of the Arabic language so that they can study primary texts critically, but it has been observed that many students still find it hard to apply the language commonly in an active manner, especially within productive skills.

Arabic is also being taught in various educational streams in Bangladesh such as madrasas, public universities, and private Islamic systems. Although the madrasa education has always placed the classical Arabic grammar and textual reading as its main priorities, the university level of Islamic Studies is supposed to be developed in the interest of wider academic and communicative competence. However, Arabic education at higher education institutions is typically limited by structural, pedagogical, and institutional factors, including little time to teach, teacher-centred pedagogy, and inconsistent utilization of Arabic as the instructional medium. These limitations bring concern as to whether the current curricular and teaching practices are effective.

The recent research on teaching the Arabic language in non-Arab environments emphasizes the importance of immersion, communicative pedagogy, and continuous exposure to the target language in achieving proficiency. Other studies have also pointed out the influence that teacher qualification, institutional language policies, as well as co-curricular support has on language outcomes. Nevertheless, there is less empirical research that investigates the functioning of these factors in Bangladeshi universities, especially in a comparative assessment between the public and the private universities.

It is against this backdrop that the current paper explores the impediments to the development of Arabic language proficiency in Islamic Studies students in Bangladesh through the two opposite institutional settings: a state university and a privately owned Islamic university. Through the qualitative approach, the research aims at investigating the effects that variations in the curricular design, medium of instruction, pedagogical practices, and institutional support structures have on the Arabic language development in students. This study will help provide setting-specific evidence to the existing literature on the Arabic language teaching theories in Islamic higher education, and will be applied to policymaking, curriculum development, and pedagogy within Bangladesh and other non-Arab settings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***Arabic Language and Islamic Studies in Non-Arab Contexts***

Arabic has a special epistemic and practical place in Islamic Studies, both as the language of the foundational religious literature and as the language of classical scholarly literature. Even in non-Arab settings, Arabic is most commonly taught as a foreign language in circumstances that can hardly be regarded as close to immersive or communicative settings. According to the research, students tend to show difficulties in achieving functional proficiency at a level higher than reading comprehension of canonical texts (Al-Batal, 2017; Al-Batal, 2024; Ryding, 2014). The teaching of language is thus biased towards textual decoding and grammatical correctness as opposed to communicative competence, and this promotes a restricted view of language learning.

### ***Pedagogical Approaches to Arabic Instruction***

South and southeast Asian Islam-based higher education in Arabic classrooms is dominated by grammar-translation methods (Hasanah, 2024). Although these approaches help students to read more correctly and interpret the text, they deprive learners of the opportunity to communicate orally,

discuss academic issues, and work independently in the field of scholarship (Alosh, 1997). Both Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) models have been proven to facilitate functional proficiency by means of meaningful interaction and learner-centered teaching (Al-Batal and Belnap, 2014; Ellis, 2009). Nevertheless, the adoption of these strategies is also not uniform, with many instructors seeing them as being incongruent with a text-based curriculum or performance-based goals (Ryding, 2014).

### ***Medium of Instruction and Language Immersion***

Language of instruction is a very important issue of competence. The immersion-based models contribute greatly to language proficiency and literacy in schools (Cummins, 2000; Lindholm-Leary, 2012). Research in non-Arab Muslim majority regions demonstrates that the model of Arabic-medium instruction of Islamic Studies can lead to greater amounts of receptive and productive skills (Rahman, 2000; Suleiman, 2013). Conversely, the use of the local language will restrict true interaction and support passive learning despite the inclusion of Arabic in the curriculum on a formal basis.

### ***Teacher Qualifications and Linguistic Input***

Qualified teachers and their academic background are very important factors to determine the level of Arabic teaching. Instructors with Arabic training have a higher probability of maintaining the constant usage of the Arabic language: they offer natural input and combine modern usage with traditional forms (Al-Batal, 2017; Al-Batal, 2024). Overreliance on the first language (L1) of learners is typically seen in the case of untrained instructors as immersive in their work (Adnan et al., 2014; Tobbi, 2024). Though there are L1 instructors who apply the L1 in strategic ways to explain complex topics, its excessive use hinders the acquisition of the language (Al-Raaisi, 2015) and points out the conflict between content teaching and language immersion (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012).

### ***Curriculum Design and Skill Integration***

Proper Arabic curricula must be able to give equal attention to reading, writing, listening, and talking. Empirical research indicates that the traditions of Islamic Studies courses often emphasize grammar and reading, but oral and aural skills are not developed, and oral and aural communication skills are not explicitly defined in the learning outcome (Hamid & Ali, 2021). Incorporating modular and proficiency-oriented course designs has been suggested to improve proficiency, especially when paired with content-based teaching, but its introduction in most public universities is still minimal (Al-Batal & Belnap, 2014).

### ***Digital Resources and Co-Curricular Support***

Online resources and after-school programs have become widely accepted as being necessary to language learning. The platforms based online, learning management systems, and mobile applications allow autonomous learning, multimodal input, and out-of-classroom interaction (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Nonetheless, they have not been widely adopted in South Asian higher education owing to institutional, technical, and infrastructural constraints (Auliya et al., 2025). Likewise, students do not have sufficient fluency and confidence in language use due to the absence of Arabic clubs, conversation circles, and unofficial practice (Hasan et al., 2024; Manan & Nasri, 2024).

### ***Research Gap***

Despite the rich information in the literature about the Arabic language pedagogy, medium of instruction, and institutional issues in non-Arab countries, there are limited empirical studies that explicitly address the issues related to the situation in Bangladeshi universities. In addition, there is scant literature that takes a comparative qualitative approach to analyse the differences between the public and the private Islamic universities in terms of handling the development of Arabic language skills. This paper attempts to address this lapse by proposing a detailed discourse of issues that students of Islamic Studies encounter in two opposite university settings in Bangladesh.

## METHODOLOGY

### ***Research Design and Justification***

The paper is based on a qualitative research method to examine the problems of students of Islamic Studies in learning the Arabic language in Bangladesh. This paradigm can be used since it facilitates a context-specific study of socially constructed experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices that inform the acquisition of language. The contexts of acquiring Arabic as a foreign language are interrelated (pedagogy, medium of instruction, teacher expertise, and institutional policies), which are hard to measure. These phenomena can be viewed in a holistic way using the interpretive approach since it focuses on the views of participants who are directly involved in the Arabic language education. The research questions used to guide the study are:

1. RQ1: How do institutional, pedagogical, and sociocultural variables contribute to developing the Arabic language skills of Islamic Studies students in Bangladesh?
2. RQ2: To what extent do various stakeholders (students, alumni, instructors, and administrators) think the existing Arabic language instruction is effective?
3. RQ3: How does the medium of instruction, teacher qualification, and institutional resources influence communicative competence in Arabic?
4. RQ4: What is the correspondence between policies and curriculum structures and classroom practices?

### ***Primary Data Collection: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews***

The primary data were gathered using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, chosen due to flexibility and ability to produce in-depth and context-specific information. The approach offers the possibility to investigate the pre-identified thematic categories, such as language of instruction, curriculum organization, teacher practices, teacher knowledge, institutional roles, and difficulties with skill development, as well as to give participants an opportunity to introduce unforeseen issues, clarify answers, and discuss their lived experiences. The semi-structured interview is especially effective when it comes to researching intricate educational practices and issues in higher education when numerous pedagogical, institutional, and sociocultural factors affect the learning outcomes.

The semi-structured interview guide was formulated (Appendix I); it would offer uniformity within the interview as well as orderly investigation of the research questions of interest. The guide was designed to meet the needs of various stakeholder groups, including students, alumni, Arabic language teachers, Islamic Studies teachers and administrators, although it was also flexible and could investigate some emerging themes. The interviews were carried out between 40 and 60 minutes each, with the participants having enough time to think and talk in depth. The data collection was mainly conducted in person, but mobile calls, email communications, and messaging services were used when it was impossible to communicate face-to-face. This multi-modal mode of approach was helpful in creating ease of access, allowing the preferences of the participants, and providing representation of the public and the private university setting.

### ***Participants***

Purposive sampling was used to have information-rich cases, which could shed light on the research problem. Subjects were recruited into the study through two institutions of higher learning (one public and one private) from 2020-2026 that teach Islamic Studies with formal components of the Arabic language. The fact that both types of institutions are included allows a comparison between them in the context and increases the in-depth analysis. The final sample comprised:

- a. Eight existing students of Islamic Studies - offering commentary on the learning experiences, acquisition of skills, challenges, and classroom dynamics.
- b. Four alumni- providing backward reflection on the results of language proficiency and the long-term effects of the teaching of Arabic.
- c. Four Arabic language teachers - thinking over pedagogical and classroom practices and curriculum implementation.

- d. Four Islamic Studies teachers - bringing out the downdraft between content presentation and the language's involvement.
- e. Four administrators - offering information regarding the policy of the institution, structural constraints, and resource discharge.

In qualitative research, a sample size of 20 to 25 semi-structured, in-depth interviews is usually adequate and defensible (particularly when dealing with focused questions and relatively homogeneous subjects and quality data), as long as you can present saturation or information power and not just a figure. (Vasileiou et al., 2018)

The multi-stakeholder strategy also guarantees triangulation of opinions, depth of interpretation, and credibility of the results. The multi-stakeholder design reinforces the principle of triangulation by bringing in the views of hierarchical and functional roles within the education ecosystem. The respondents were chosen through direct involvement with the teaching of the Arabic language, which made them relevant and authoritative. The sampling was continued until they achieved thematic sufficiency, which defined thematic sufficiency as the stage where further interviews could not provide any new analytically significant categories.

The sample was selected using a theoretically informed purposive strategy based on one public university and one private university, which was based on the Islamic university.

The reason the public university was chosen was that the structure of Islamic Studies programs in the public universities in Bangladesh is similar: they take similar curricula, only two courses in Arabic language are usually offered, and the instructional language is in Bengali. It is this institutional homogeneity that enables a single public university to act as a reflection of a model that is dominant in the public sector.

The chosen private Islamic university was involved due to the fact that it is a unique case. The institution offers its program in Arabic as the medium of instruction, unlike most private universities, in which the program in Islamic Studies is also taught in Bengali. Being the only case of the kind in Bangladesh, it provides a substantial contrast to the study of the role of medium of instruction and institutional orientation in the development of Arabic language skills.

### ***Secondary Data: Document Analysis and Literature Review***

To complement primary data, secondary sources were analysed, including institutional documents such as curricula, course syllabi, and language policies, as well as scholarly literature on Arabic language pedagogy in non-Arab contexts. This content analysis allowed the study to corroborate participants' narratives, assess alignment between policy and practice, and situate findings within broader theoretical and empirical frameworks, thereby enhancing analytical rigor.

### ***Thematic Analysis of Primary Data***

A thematic interpretive analysis was conducted on all interviews, which were transcribed word-for-word and underwent a systematic, multi-stage process. First, the transcripts were repeatedly read to make them familiar with the narratives of the participants and their contextual subtleties. The relevant segments were then inductively coded, where the views of the participants were in their own words, which were then categorized into more general themes using axial coding to find out patterns, relationships, and some differences between the groups of stakeholders. These groups were further divided into six broad themes that embody the main issues that affect the development of Arabic language skills in both the government and the private universities.

The six identified themes include:

1. Medium of Instruction and Limited Arabic Exposure, which notes the limitation created by Bengali-medium instruction and limited exposure to the use of Arabic in the classroom
2. Shortage of Arab World-Trained Arabic Language Teachers, which addresses the effects of

- limiting the authenticity of linguistic input and exposure to contemporary Arabic use
3. Dominance of Grammar-Translation and Text-Centred Pedagogy, which notes the impact of over-reliance on reading and grammar at the cost of communicative skills
  4. Absence of digital learning infrastructure
  5. Limited co-curricular communicative practice; and
  6. Structural and institutional constraints (e.g., class size, time allocation).

Comparative studies among students, teachers, and administrators and between the two schools of higher education indicated some similar and different experiences, which explains the collective influence of institutional and pedagogical issues on Arabic language proficiency.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The research process adhered strictly to ethical standards. All participants signed informed consent forms before the data collection, and the importance of the study, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time were clearly explained to them. Aspects of confidentiality and anonymity were strongly guaranteed: the identity of the participants was anonymised, and all data were safely stored and only viewed by the research team. Caution was taken to reduce possible discomfort/risk, and the subjects were assured that the results would be published in an aggregated form so as to avoid personal identification.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The given work is based on three interconnected theories that can be used to examine the development of Arabic language skills among the students of Islamic Studies: Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the Krashenian Input Hypothesis. SCT also focuses more on how social interaction, tools, and scaffolding in the Zone of Proximal Development of a learner mediate learning, and it stresses the role of teacher guidance and peer cooperation in the process of language acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978). CLT is more oriented to the attainment of functional communicative competence, through the involvement of learners in meaningful real-life situations, in preference to rote memorizing (Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 2002). The Hypothesis of input by Krashen is that acquisition takes place in the case of exposure to comprehensible input that is slightly above the level of proficiency of the learner, making sustained and meaningful exposure to language very important (Krashen, 1985).

These combined frameworks examine the interaction of instruction, institutional practices, and teacher knowledge as well as access to resources to encourage or inhibit Arabic competency. SCT provides a view of the processes of mediated learning in the classroom, CLT provides an understanding in the evaluation of communicative acts and association of skills, and the Hypothesis of the Input explains the role played by exposure in the acquisition of receptive and productive language skills. Taken together, these theories offer a comprehensive foundation for the analysis of both pedagogical and structural variables of the Arabic language development in non-Arabian higher educational settings.

## **FINDINGS (DOCUMENT ANALYSIS)**

### ***Arabic Language Instruction in Public and Private Universities in Bangladesh***

The Arabic language teaching in universities in Bangladesh has a lot of variations in the teaching of the language between the state and private institutions, which includes their curriculum design, the medium of instruction, teaching qualification, and support of the institutions. A comparative analysis of Public University I and Private Islamic University I explains how the factors influence the development of Arabic language skills among the students of Islamic Studies.

### ***Course Structure and Curriculum Scope***

The curriculum of the course in the Arabic language used by Islamic Studies students at Public University I is very limited. The program contains only two mandatory courses, namely, Al-Adab Al-Arabi (Arabic Literature) and Functional Arabic Language. Students can also choose to pursue a one-

year course in International Multinational Language, which is open to all departments; though this course does not impart sustained and specialized training in the Arabic language. As a result, Arabic is not a fundamental but an additional part of the academic curriculum (Official Document, Public University).

Conversely, the curriculum offered by the Private Islamic University-I is a comprehensive and skills-based Arabic curriculum. There are a number of mandatory non-credit courses that are directly aimed at language skills, such as Arabic Reading, Writing, Composition, Morphology, and Listening and Speaking. Credit-bearing course syllabuses include Arabic Grammar I, Arabic Grammar II, and Arabic Literature and Text to supplement these. Besides this, all core Islamic Studies courses at Private Islamic University I are taught in Arabic, which provides constant exposure to Arabic and strengthens academic and communicative competence. (Official Document, Private University)

### ***Medium of Instruction and Language Exposure***

The medium of instruction is a fundamental factor in the development of the Arabic language. In Public University I, the courses in Arabic language and Islamic Studies are mainly given in Bengali, and therefore the students are not exposed to the Arabic input extensively, and the chances of practicing communication are also minimized. Arabic is therefore handled more like an academic issue of study than as a means of communication. Arabic is thus treated largely as an academic subject rather than as a functional medium of communication (Official Document, Public University).

In the case of Private Islamic University I, Arabic is officially employed as the language of instruction in Arabic language and Islamic Studies, which contributes to the creation of an immersion-oriented learning environment. However, students have testified that there are cases when the instructors use Bengali in explaining the complicated aspects or communicating with mixed-proficiency classes, a factor that partly undermines the intended immersion. (Official Document, Private University)

### ***Teacher Qualifications and Linguistic Modelling***

Another factor is that of teacher academic background. Public University I also have a problem with the number of Arabic language teachers who have graduated from Arab world universities. This restricts students to real-life pronunciation, modern use, and spoken academic Arabic, and promotes text-based teaching methods (Official Document, Public University).

In comparison, the number of Arabic language instructors teaching in Private Islamic University I is large, with most of them having been trained in Arab world universities. This gives students more linguistic input and a stronger exposure to the real language models. Nevertheless, this advantage is sometimes diluted by inconsistent use of the Arabic-only practices in the classroom by the pedagogue practicing it (Official Document, Private University).

## **FINDINGS: SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW ANALYSIS**

Thematic analysis of the primary data indicated that the development of Arabic language skills among the Islamic Studies students in Bangladesh, in both the public and the private universities, was influenced by six key challenges. These issues cut across pedagogical, institutional, and structural levels as they represent convergent and divergent experiences of students, alumni, instructors, and administrators. The results demonstrate the influence of medium of instruction, teacher qualification, pedagogy, institutional provisions, co-curricular provision, and structural limitation on shaping Arabic proficiency of students. The main themes are addressed individually as discussed below, with subthemes and illustrative quotes, and the analysis is provided respectively.

### ***Medium of Instruction and Limited Arabic Exposure***

The medium of instruction became a key factor in the Arabic proficiency of students. In the state university, most of the courses were offered in Bengali, thus denying the students a chance to experience genuine Arabic communication and restricting their exposure to academic and oral languages. This dependence on the mother tongue of the students (L1) inhibited the understanding

of Arabic, as well as the communicative competence. One participant explained:

The majority of our classes are in Bengali, so we study the grammar and vocabulary but we do not speak much Arabic. What we study cannot be put into practice in real life (Current Student, Public University).

Conversely, the private Islamic university used Arabic as a medium of instruction in both Arabic and Islamic Studies courses and encouraged long-term exposure and immersion. This strategy enhanced a greater level of linguistic naturalism and applied language learning whereby students acquired grammatical structures and vocabulary by meaningful application. Nevertheless, some code-switching by the instructors into Bengali when describing more complicated issues slightly watered down immersion:

Although we are taking the courses in Arabic, not all teachers are able to maintain immersion as some teachers change to Bengali to elaborate on complex issues (Current Student, Private University).

### ***Shortage of Arab World–Trained Arabic Language Teachers***

The qualifications and background of teachers played a vital role in determining the quality of instruction and the learning outcomes of students. In the state university, the number of university-trained instructors from the Arab world was significantly low, and hence there was a lack of exposure to the use of authentic Arabic applications. Learners have complained that non-Arab-trained teachers were heavily dependent on translation-based methods, which placed great importance on grammar knowledge, and textual understanding, as opposed to communicative proficiency:

The majority of our teachers studied in Bangladesh and are not very fluent in spoken Arabic. They emphasize more on texts and grammar rather than on conversation skills (Student, Public University).

The private Islamic university, in its turn, hired mostly Arab-trained teachers, which contributed to the increased authenticity of the language input and offered its students up-to-date and spoken versions:

The teachers who studied in Arab World universities support us impressively to know the actual use of Arabic and contemporary expressions, not necessarily classical grammar (Student, Private University).

Administrators recognized such inequalities as institutional and structural barriers, where faculty trained in Arab had a hard time recruiting because of the cultural and logistical barriers:

The idea of getting Arab-trained teachers recruiting is not often recruiting but we understand that it is necessary in enhancing language standards (Administrator, Public University).

This information highlights that teacher competence is an important facilitator of proficiency, and its absence may augment other pedagogical constraints, especially in non-Arabic-medium schools.

### ***Dominance of Grammar–Translation and Text-Centred Pedagogy***

Grammar-translation and text-centred approaches were reported to be a constant hindrance to the balanced development of the Arabic language. In both universities, the attention of instructors was directed more towards reading and understanding the text rather than speaking and listening, which is a characteristic feature of the traditional approach to pedagogy: form, but not function:

The majority of our instruction is founded in reading books and knowing rules. The Arabic language is hardly spoken in class (Arabic Language Instructor, Public University).

The instructors in the private universities tried to complement this practice with non-credited courses

on skills such as listening, writing, and speaking. However, the presence of anxiety and lack of confidence as well as perceived academic pressure frequently restricted the participation of students:

It is an effort to teach learning by small exercises, listening and speaking, but students are timid and awkward to talk before the entire class. (Arabic Language Instructor, Private University)

Critically, while text-centred approaches provide foundational grammatical knowledge, they do not adequately prepare students for functional language use, particularly in real-life or academic discourse contexts. This imbalance between theoretical knowledge and practical application is a central pedagogical challenge in both university contexts.

### ***Absence of Digital Platforms for Arabic Language Learning***

Another major limitation found was the absence of digital infrastructure and web-based resources in order to supplement traditional teaching. The students and the instructors stressed that the lack of e-learning modules, interactive platforms, or language applications limited independent learning and practice outside of the classroom:

We do not have any online platform to practice Arabic or even check our assignments online. We must just have to depend on textbooks (Current Student, Public University).

Another point that was brought to the fore by instructors was that digital tools may promote engagement, instant feedback, and self-directed learning:

And there the students could have their online exercises, discussion forums, or language applications that the university offers, and practice more outside of classes (Arabic Language Instructor, Private University).

This observation highlights the importance of technology in modern language acquisition, especially where there is no Arab-speaking environment and in which classroom exposure is not enough to build proficiency.

### ***Lack of Co-Curricular Arabic Language Practice Opportunities***

The researchers concluded that there were few or no co-curricular activities that allowed practicing Arabic. Students and graduates of the public universities were not informed of any organized Arabic clubs or discussion forums and extracurricular activities, restricting the use of the real language:

We do not possess an Arabic club or discussion group. We are not able to speak to classmates privately, if we would like to put them into practice (Alumnus, Public University).

Some informal peer-led conversation circles were present in the case of students of the private universities, though they were not always present and supported by the institution:

Some students form small groups of Arabic conversation, but the university does not support these (Current Student, Private University).

The absence of co-curricular activity is especially disadvantageous since it is necessary to have repeated and significant activity in language acquisition, which is impossible with classroom teaching only.

### ***Structural and Institutional Constraints***

Lastly, structural and institutional constraints were also very restrictive to the Arabic language development. The two universities cited large class sizes, a lack of enough time to teach, and poor support for extra language practice:

The classes are too big and the teachers are not able to pay personal attention to students. In

addition, language practice is not properly allocated time (Current Student, Public University).

The administrators noted infrastructural issues such as inadequate classrooms, absence of language labs and time constraints:

Scheduling and infrastructure are issues. It is due to our lack of classrooms and the ability to provide more language laboratories or practice sessions to every student. (Administrator, Private University)

In addition, the majority of the respondents claimed that in the program of Arabic Islamic Studies in the general universities, offering two courses in the Arabic language in terms of pedagogic value was not enough to ensure any significant level of proficiency in the Arabic language. This kind of curricular exposure does not give the input, integration of skills, and progressive scaffolding needed to be effective in language acquisition. Consequently, the students cannot achieve competence in key language skills, especially speaking and listening. The small amount of Arabic coursework is a structural underestimation of language training in Islamic Studies programs, which restricts the academic access of students to primary Islamic texts and their academic and professional opportunities.

Critically, these structural constraints compound pedagogical limitations, as even motivated instructors and immersive curricula cannot fully overcome issues such as overcrowded classrooms or restricted hours for language practice.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this paper show that the development of Arabic language skills among the students of Islamic Studies in Bangladesh is a complex interaction between the pedagogical practices, institutional arrangements, and structural constraints. They could be effectively explained in terms of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 2002), and the Input Hypothesis introduced by Krashen (1985). Together, these frameworks shed light on the mediation of learning opportunities, i.e., the role played by language exposure, the quality of instruction, practices in interaction, and institutional support systems.

### ***Medium of Instruction and Language Exposure***

The language of instruction became one of the preliminary determinants of Arabic competence. The use of Bengali as the instructional language in the public university environment substantially deprives students of exposure to Arabic, meaning fewer opportunities to interact, negotiate, and scaffold the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Within SCT, the less contact there is with the target language, the less social mediation is possible in internalizing linguistic forms and communicative functions. In comparison, the Arabic-based instruction in the privately run Islamic university helps to maintain uninterrupted exposure and increased involvement with academic Arabic, which makes receptive and productive skills of the learners more powerful.

Such discoveries also coincide with CLT principles that focus on meaningful communication and contextualised language use as the main source of communicative competence development (Canale & Swain, 1980). Instruction in Bengali, especially where teacher-directed explanation and translation are used, negatively affects communicative opportunities and the use of language in situations. Arabic-medium instruction, on the other hand, is closer to the CLT concept of immersion and interaction, although some code-switching makes it somewhat ineffective. According to the Input Hypothesis by Krashen, there is a greater availability of comprehensible input in Arabic-medium instruction that the acquisition process requires, and this is less the case with limited exposure in the Bengali-medium instruction (Krashen, 1985).

### ***Teacher Expertise and Quality of Linguistic Mediation***

Teacher academic background and training emerged as a critical mediating factor in language development. Instructors trained in Arab world universities were perceived as providing more authentic linguistic input, contemporary usage, and effective scaffolding. SCT conceptualizes teachers as key mediators who structure learning through interaction, modelling, and guided participation (Vygotsky, 1978). In this regard, Arab-trained instructors are better positioned to facilitate mediated learning by exposing students to functional language use beyond classical textual forms.

In contrast, the shortage of such instructors in public universities contributes to an overreliance on grammar-focused and translation-based pedagogy, limiting students' oral proficiency and communicative confidence. CLT theory underscores that teachers' communicative competence and methodological orientation directly influence learners' functional language outcomes (Savignon, 2002). Similarly, Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that exposure to fluent, proficient speakers enhances the availability of rich and meaningful input, which is often lacking when instruction is dominated by non-immersive practices (Krashen, 1985).

### ***Pedagogical Orientation and Skill Imbalance***

The prevalence of grammar-translation and text-based pedagogy in both schools is indicative of an enduring systemic bias of declarative knowledge in relation to communicative competence. Although these methods can facilitate reading comprehension and grammatical correctness, they do not offer much opportunity to interact, negotiate meanings, and use language spontaneously. According to SCT, learning that is not interactive is limiting in internalizing skills as well as inhibiting the ability of learners to apply knowledge to actual communicative situations (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the CLT perspective, such pedagogical imbalance demeans the process of communication competency development, since learners are seldom subjected to a task or activity that models the actual language use (Canale & Swain, 1980). The framework developed by Krashen also suggests that only grammar teaching will never result in acquisition unless it is accompanied by meaningful input and communicative interaction (Krashen, 1985). This marginalization of speaking and listening skills is reinforced by the optional nature of the skill-based non-credit courses even in the private university where they do exist, as their impact on the system is marginal.

### ***Digital and Co-Curricular Learning Environments***

The lack of digital platforms and systematic co-curricular activity is one huge opportunity that is not taken to conduct learning outside of the classrooms. SCT also treats tools and technologies as mediational artifacts that are capable of facilitating interaction, collaboration, and self-regulated learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The unavailability of digital resources hence restricts access for students to additional input and practice, especially in non-immersive settings.

CLT also focuses on the outcome of learner autonomy and communicative practice in any type of context, as well as technology-mediated settings (Savignon, 2002). Online discussion forums, and language applications could be used to engage in meaningful interaction and support classroom learning. Within the view of the Input Hypothesis, these resources would increase the exposure of learners to comprehensible input, especially in multimodal and self-paced modes of delivery (Krashen, 1985). In the same fashion, the lack of Arabic clubs, discussion groups, and discussion forums also limits peer interaction, which is considered by SCT as one of the primary mechanisms of language internalization (Muid & Rohman, 2019).

### ***Structural and Institutional Constraints***

Pedagogical challenges are further maintained by structural constraints such as high class sizes, limited instruction time, and inadequate administrative support. SCT puts emphasis on the fact that the mediation process needs personalized treatment as well as a lengthy interaction, which is compromised in a crowded classroom (Vygotsky, 1978). Empirical research supports the idea that in large classes, the teacher is not able to track progress, give feedback, and support active learning, which undermines the effectiveness of instructional practices (Roshan, 2022).

The constraints of resources, such as the lack of teaching material and infrastructure, also limit the use of an interactive and learner-centred approach to teaching (Onwu & Stoffels, 2005). CLT presupposes the time and resource access to facilitate communicative endeavours and group interaction, whereas the framework of Krashen highlights the limited time of instructional input restricting exposure to comprehensible information (Krashen, 1985; Savignon, 2002). These limitations are not independent of one another but instead work in a cumulative manner with pedagogical and institutional dimensions, which creates long-lasting obstacles to the development of the Arabic language.

### ***Integrative Interpretation***

Combined, SCT, CLT, and the Input Hypothesis give a consistent explanatory framework of the development of the Arabic language in Islamic Studies programs. The quality of mediation and teacher expertise is influenced by the medium of instruction and teacher expertise; the potential of communicative interaction lies with those opportunities of pedagogical orientation, and institutional and structural circumstances restrict the limits of interaction, practice, and immersion. To tackle all these interconnected issues, the way to solve these problems is by reforming the whole system of instructional practices, teacher development, and institutional support to match the theories of second language acquisition.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has critically discussed the issues of developing Arabic language skills in Islam Studies students in Bangladesh by comparing a government-run university to a privatized university. The results prove that the differences in Arabic proficiency are not purely personal or incentive-based, but they are grounded in the structural, pedagogical, and institutional organization. The language of instruction became a critical point whereby the dominance of instruction in Bengali in the state university greatly restricted exposure to Arabic and inhibited communicative competence, whereas Arabic instruction in the private university allowed higher rates of competence because of consistent exposure. Nevertheless, within the domestic setting, the discrepancies in the teaching activities and the use of traditional pedagogies undermined the possible learning benefits.

The paper also indicates that there is a lack of Arab world trained teachers, a grammar-translation and text-based teaching style, and a lack of digital and co-curricular learning environment among others, which limits the opportunities of meaningful interaction and skills fusion. These difficulties are compounded by structural constraints, i.e., large classes, limited time for instruction, and lack of institutional support, which result in a compounding effect on effective language acquisition. These findings, through the prism of Sociocultural Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and the Input Hypothesis, highlight the fact that Arabic language development relies on the quality of mediation, access to comprehensible input, and chances of authentic communication.

On the whole, the paper submits that the achievement of Arabic proficiency in the Islamic Studies programs needs systematic reform and not individual pedagogical changes. Devoid of concerted reforms in the language policy, teacher training, the development of curricula and institutional infrastructure, the attempt to improve Arabic language education in pre-Arab settings like Bangladesh is bound to continue being disparate and constrained in terms of their effects.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on empirical findings and theoretical insights, this study proposes several policy-oriented measures to enhance Arabic language proficiency in Islamic Studies bachelor programs in Bangladesh. First, public universities should gradually increase the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction in both Arabic language courses and selected core Islamic Studies subjects. Such an approach would extend sustained exposure to the target language and promote communicative competence through immersion-oriented learning.

Second, recruitment policies should prioritize Arabic language instructors with advanced academic training from universities in the Arab world. Where immediate recruitment is not feasible, institutions should invest in structured professional development, including overseas training, immersion programs, and continuous pedagogical renewal. Third, comprehensive curricular reform is required to reduce excessive reliance on grammar-translation methods and to systematically integrate communicative, skill-based pedagogies. Balanced development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills should be embedded across courses to facilitate functional language acquisition.

Fourth, universities should establish robust digital infrastructure—such as learning management systems, online practice platforms, and mobile applications—to support self-directed learning and sustained language exposure beyond the classroom. Fifth, co-curricular initiatives, including Arabic language clubs, conversation circles, debate forums, and peer-led discussion groups, should be institutionalized to foster informal practice and learner motivation. Additionally, structural constraints must be addressed by reducing class sizes, allocating sufficient instructional time, and investing in language laboratories and multimedia resources.

Beyond these measures, public universities are encouraged to expand both the number and scope of Arabic language courses. Given the current insufficiency of Arabic offerings, core Islamic Studies courses—such as Qur’anic Studies, Hadith, and Fiqh—should increasingly be taught in Arabic. This curricular integration would contextualize language learning within disciplinary content, strengthen academic literacy, and enhance students’ capacity for critical engagement with primary Islamic sources, thereby improving overall academic performance.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has a number of limitations that should be considered. To begin with, it had two universities in Chittagong, which might restrict the applicability of the results to other state and non-state institutions in Bangladesh or other non-Arabic-speaking settings. Second, the study was based on qualitative data mostly; there was a provision of in-depth interviews but could be furthered by the use of triangulation of empirical validity with the quantitative aspects of language levels. Third, the research was restricted to Islamic Studies courses but not other courses where the Arabic language is taught as a foreign language.

Future studies might extend the investigation to embrace various public and private universities in the country into a mixed-methods study combining qualitative understanding with quantitative measures of skills. The longitudinal studies may also investigate how interventions like Arabic-medium instruction, the use of digital platforms, and co-curricular programs may affect language development in the long run. Moreover, studying the motivation of students, the influence of cultural factors, and exposure to media in Arabic may give a more sophisticated insight into the processes of Arabic acquisition in a non-Arabic-speaking setting.

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## APPENDIX 1: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE TABLE

Stakeholder Group	Objective	Key Thematic Areas	Sample Focus Questions
<b>Current Students</b>	Explore lived experiences and perceived challenges in Arabic learning	Medium of instruction; curriculum scope; pedagogy; teacher expertise; institutional and digital support	What is the linguistic manner of conducting courses? Is exposure sufficient? Are four skills addressed? What are some of the teaching strategies? Are materials (labs, clubs, digital tools) sufficient?
<b>Alumni</b>	Assess retrospective language outcomes and program effectiveness	Proficiency upon graduation; enabling/hindering factors; practice opportunities; professional relevance	What was your level of preparedness in Arabic? What was the form of program influences on proficiency? How useful is your Arabic expertise in contemporary conditions?
<b>Arabic Language Instructors</b>	Examine instructional practices and constraints	Language use in class; pedagogy; skill assessment; institutional support	What is the medium of instruction? The manner in which four skills are taught and assessed? Which are the structural issues in teaching?
<b>Islamic Studies Instructors</b>	Analyze integration of content teaching	Arabic-medium content delivery; language	What is the impact of the Arabic-medium instruction on the

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Key Thematic Areas</b>	<b>Sample Focus Questions</b>
<b>University Administrators</b>	and language development Investigate institutional policies and structural support	scaffolding; student comprehension Language policy; resource allocation; strategic planning	understanding? In what way is language support incorporated? What are the policies that govern medium of instruction? What are some of the institutional supports? What reforms are planned?