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## Adaptive Strategies and Creativity of Indonesian Teachers of Arabic in Overcoming Teaching Challenges in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to uncover the adaptive strategies and creativity of Indonesian Arabic teachers in overcoming the challenges of teaching in Malaysia, and to explain how these teachers adapt their pedagogical approaches in the context of cross-cultural education. This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation of three Indonesian Arabic teachers who had taught at Islamic educational institutions in Malaysia. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data integration, (3) data condensation, and (4) drawing conclusions. The results show that the success of Indonesian Arabic teachers in Malaysia is determined by three main aspects: (1) intercultural adaptive ability in understanding the local education system and culture, (2) pedagogical creativity in developing learning methods and media that suit the characteristics of Malaysian students, and (3) reflective and collaborative attitudes in building positive relationships with students and colleagues. These findings emphasize the importance of developing adaptive and creative competencies for Arabic teachers who teach in multicultural and cross-national contexts.

#### Keyword

Adaptive Strategy; Pedagogical Creativity; Arabic Language Teacher; Malaysia

يهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن الاستراتيجيات التكيفية والإبداعية التي يستخدمها معلمو اللغة العربية من إندونيسيا في مواجهة تحديات التعليم في ماليزيا، وبيان كيفية تكيفهم لمناهجهم التربوية في سياق التعليم العابر للثقافات. استخدم هذا البحث المنهج النوعي بأسلوب دراسة الحالة، وتم جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات المتعمقة والملاحظات والتوثيق لثلاثة من معلمي اللغة العربية الإندونيسيين الذين درّسوا في مؤسسات التعليم الإسلامي في ماليزيا. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام نموذج مايلز وهوبرمان وسالدانيا الذي يتضمن أربع مراحل: جمع البيانات، دمجها، تكثيفها، واستخلاص النتائج. أظهرت النتائج أن نجاح معلمي اللغة العربية الإندونيسيين في ماليزيا يعتمد على ثلاثة جوانب رئيسية: القدرة التكيفية بين الثقافات في فهم النظام التعليمي والثقافة المحلية، والإبداع التربوي في تطوير أساليب ووسائل التعليم بما يتناسب مع خصائص الطلاب الماليزيين، والموقف التأملي والتعاوني في بناء علاقات إيجابية مع الطلاب والزملاء. وتؤكد هذه النتائج أهمية تنمية الكفاءات التكيفية والإبداعية لمعلمي اللغة العربية في السياقات متعددة الثقافات وعبر الوطنية.

الاستراتيجيات التكيفية ١؛ الإبداع التربوي ٢؛ معلمو اللغة العربية ٣؛ ماليزيا 4

كلمات أساسية

## Introduction (المقدمة)

Arabic has long been central to education in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is a region marked by extraordinary cultural and religious diversity, shaped by centuries of trade, migration, and the spread of the world's major religions, including Islam. Since the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia, scholars have established educational institutions that play a central role in transmitting religious knowledge and providing moral instruction. These schools, known as pondok and madrasah, have historically facilitated not only religious education but also broader intellectual and cultural exchange, both within and beyond Southeast Asian Muslim communities. Arabic, as the sacred language of the Quran, remains a core element in

these institutions, serving both as a liturgical language and a means of interacting with classical Islamic scholarship (Sofian dkk., 2025).

Furthermore, the importance of Arabic is not only seen from its function in the context of Islamic education, but also from its position as one of the world's great languages that holds high spiritual and scientific value. All languages in the world have a certain importance, because language is a tool for expressing and imagining human feelings and emotions. The Qur'an is the main source of Islam, the source of laws and provisions, the language of the Qur'an is at the highest level of eloquence and expression, every word or phrase in the verses of the Qur'an is fluent and fluent (Shamsuddin & Sara, 2017). In the context of its implementation in educational institutions, both in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia, various forms of Arabic language instruction are implemented to suit the needs of students. Some schools offer Arabic language programs as part of the full-time curriculum, while others offer them as extracurricular activities (Rusli dkk., 2024)

Arabic now functions as one of the official languages in various international Islamic organizations, such as the Islamic World League (Rabithah al-'Alam al-Islami) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which includes 45 Islamic countries or countries with a Muslim majority population (Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). Among the organization's members are Indonesia and Malaysia, two countries strategically located in Southeast Asia. As an international language with religious and academic value, Arabic plays a vital role in various aspects of life, particularly in education, religion, and culture.

In Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, Arabic is positioned not only as a scientific language but also as a religious language, serving as a primary tool in Islamic studies. As higher education develops in both countries, attention to Arabic language learning is increasing. Educational institutions in both countries are increasingly recognizing its importance, both as a source language for Islamic teachings and as a scientific language in the development of Islamic knowledge. Arabic holds a special position in Indonesia and Malaysia as the

language of the Quran and Islamic studies. Many students study it because of its close connection to Islamic teachings.

In Malaysia, Arabic even has additional functions related to government and law, while in Indonesia, Arabic is more prominent in religious practices and the activities of Islamic organizations. Despite these similarities in their religious functions, the two countries exhibit fundamental differences in the approaches and strategies for teaching Arabic applied in their respective educational institutions. These differences encompass the curriculum, learning programs, teaching methods, and the challenges faced by educators and students during the learning process (Adlini dkk., 2022).

The development of the Arabic language curriculum in Malaysia after independence was carried out under the authority of the Malaysian Ministry of Education and has undergone continuous refinement. The new secondary school curriculum was implemented in 1983, then refined into the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools in 1993. This curriculum was subsequently developed into the Standard Secondary School Curriculum 2006, and finally revised into the Standard Secondary School Curriculum in 2017 (Anisatin & Asmui, 2023). The Arabic language learning curriculum was developed so that the learning process (of Arabic) becomes more qualitative, follows the development of science (intellectual relevance) and the needs of society (community), and its output is produced by market demand (social relevance) (Illyah dkk., 2025). With these developments, in both Indonesia and Malaysia, Arabic occupies an important position as a language with a dual function: as a religious language that serves as a means of worship and Islamic study, as well as an intellectual language that plays a role in the development of Islamic knowledge in higher education institutions.

Arabic holds a special place in Islamic civilization. It is not merely a means of communication, but also a language of revelation, knowledge, and civilization. Since the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, it has served as the primary medium for the dissemination and development of Islamic sciences, such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, aqidah, and Sufism. In the modern context, the role of Arabic has expanded, not only

in the Arab world but also in non-Arab Muslim regions such as Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and Malaysia. In Islamic education, mastery of Arabic is key to understanding primary Islamic sources and accessing classical and contemporary scholarly treasures. Historically, Arabic was established as the state language during the reign of Caliph Malik ibn Marwan, during the Umayyad Caliphate. Regardless of the political motives behind the use of Arabic as the state language at that time, it is certain that from that time on, Arabic was no longer solely a religious domain (Handriawan, 2015). The spread of Islamic teachings throughout Indonesia has had a significant impact on Arabic language learning to this day. This is evident in the continued attention given to Arabic, ensuring its continued existence in both Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), madrasahs (Islamic schools), and formal and non-formal education (Widodo, 2020).

Arabic language instruction has long been a part of the Islamic education system in Malaysia, both in religious schools, madrasahs, and universities. However, in practice, Arabic language instruction still faces various obstacles that affect the effectiveness of the learning process. Arabic language instruction has long been implemented in various educational institutions, but as is known, Arabic has not yet developed as well as other foreign languages, such as English (Munip, 2020). English, as a global lingua franca, increasingly dominates various fields of life such as business, technology, science, and entertainment. This situation also impacts the position of Arabic in Malaysia, which tends to be placed solely in religious and academic contexts, rather than as a language of global communication. As a result, learners' motivation for Arabic is often limited to religious and academic needs, rather than social or professional demands.

Globalization, which has led to the dominance of English in science, technology, and international communication, has tended to marginalize Arabic. The phenomena of urbanization and migration have also led to social interactions between various dialects, triggering the dominance of certain dialects and the emergence of a standard language (Saputra dkk., 2025). In the multiethnic and multilingual context of Malaysia, this linguistic diversity strengthens the position of the national language and English, while Arabic faces challenges in maintaining its

relevance as a language of Islamic knowledge and communication. From a pedagogical perspective, the main challenge arises from the learning methods and approaches used. Many educational institutions still employ traditional methods based on memorization and translation, thus not fully supporting the development of students' communicative competence. However, to increase learning effectiveness, more communicative and contextual methods are needed so that students can use Arabic actively. In this context, the role of modern learning media is crucial. There are many Arabic language applications available on Android smartphones through the Google Play Store (Rokia, 2025). With this diversity, they provide a tremendous service to the Arabic language and science, in terms of teaching it to both native and non-native speakers.

The use of digital media opens up significant opportunities for teachers and students in Malaysia to implement more interactive and engaging learning. This media not only helps increase learning motivation but also enables targeted competency achievement. This media is used to achieve graduate learning outcomes (GLOs), specifically enabling students to understand Arabic vocabulary, linguistic rules, and Arabic texts and practice them in sentences relevant to the theme or chapter being studied (Salma Salsabila Prissa dkk., 2025). Through technology integration, students can access a variety of authentic resources, enrich their learning experiences, and practice using language in broader contexts. However, the effective use of methods and media depends heavily on the competence of the teaching staff.

Many Arabic language teachers in Malaysia face challenges in mastering modern learning technologies and understanding authentic Arabic cultural contexts. These limitations often hinder innovation and adaptation to the learning needs of a younger generation familiar with the digital world. Furthermore, cultural background plays a significant role, as differences in values and norms between Arab and local Malaysian cultures can influence perception and understanding of the language. Therefore, Arabic language teaching in Malaysia needs to be directed towards a more integrative approach, focusing not only on linguistic aspects but also

on cultural, technological, and teacher professional dimensions to produce more relevant and sustainable learning.

The phenomenon of Indonesian teachers teaching in Malaysia reflects the dynamics of cross-border education that are interesting to study in greater depth. This flow of educator mobility between countries demonstrates that the teaching profession is no longer confined to national boundaries but has become part of an interconnected global education system. The presence of Indonesian teachers in Malaysian schools not only serves to meet the need for teaching staff but also enriches educational practices through cultural and pedagogical exchange. However, differences in policies, curricula, and teaching and learning approaches between Indonesia and Malaysia often pose challenges for teachers in adapting. They need to understand the social and cultural context of local students to be able to teach effectively and build harmonious relationships with students and colleagues. The concept of education in Malaysia itself can be divided into two parts: education in the classroom and education in the community (Wahyudi dkk., 2024). This model shows that education is not only limited to formal activities in the classroom, but also includes the process of character formation through social experiences and the surrounding environment.

In practice, Malaysia emphasizes a balance between academic achievement and moral development, so teachers are expected to act as facilitators who instill social and humanitarian values. In Malaysia, teachers better understand the importance of inclusive education but require further training to optimally address special needs (Rupinis dkk., 2024). This indicates that although awareness of the importance of inclusivity has grown, ongoing support in the form of training and policies is still needed to ensure the implementation of inclusive education is truly effective in practice. Furthermore, the academic aspect of multicultural education in Malaysia also focuses on developing attitudes of tolerance and inclusion among students. This includes programs designed to teach values such as mutual respect, cooperation, and social justice (Amaliati dkk., 2021). Through this approach, the Malaysian education system strives to develop individuals who not only possess

high intellectual abilities but also possess social empathy and a sense of responsibility toward cultural diversity.

Indonesian teachers involved in this system are required to understand the characteristics of multiethnic students and implement learning strategies relevant to the Malaysian social context. This challenge often pushes them to develop more flexible, interactive, and adaptive teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Therefore, the experiences of Indonesian teachers in Malaysia can make an important contribution to the development of more responsive and inclusive cross-cultural learning models. They serve not only as teachers but also as bridges connecting two distinct educational cultures: religiously oriented Indonesia and multicultural Malaysia. This phenomenon opens up significant opportunities for academic research to explore how cross-national teachers construct their professional identities amidst differences in educational systems and cultures. However, research on Indonesian teachers in Malaysia remains relatively limited, particularly regarding how they adapt their pedagogical practices in a multilingual and multi-ethnic environment. Therefore, further research is needed to understand their adaptation strategies, challenges, and contributions to the sustainable development of cross-national education.

There are similarities in the development of Islamic education in Indonesia and Malaysia, namely their relatively similar backgrounds. Both countries have a majority Muslim population (87.18% in Indonesia and 60.4% in Malaysia), and both experienced periods of European colonization, which hampered the process of Islamic da'wah and the development of Islamic education. These historical and cultural similarities have led to nearly identical trends in Islamic education policy in both countries, both in terms of curriculum, educational objectives, and learning models. Furthermore, the close social and religious ties between Indonesia and Malaysia have also given rise to new dynamics in education, one of which is the presence of Indonesian teachers teaching in Malaysian educational institutions, such as the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) and several madrasas under the auspices of the Indonesian Embassy. However, research specifically addressing

this cross-border phenomenon is still limited and has not been studied in depth (Sejatiningrum, 2019). This study provides a new perspective on multigrade learning models in non-formal settings, differing from previous studies that focused primarily on formal schools. This confirms that there is still ample room to expand the research focus on cross-border educational practices, particularly those related to the teaching context of Indonesian teachers abroad (Wirya dkk., 2024).

The application of the Montessori method is directly proportional to learning motivation, which can be an alternative approach to understanding how Indonesian teachers adapt to the Malaysian education system and culture. By implementing a flexible learning approach like Montessori, Indonesian teachers in Malaysia can adapt their teaching strategies to the characteristics of students from different cultural and social backgrounds (Azrial Syahrur Ramadahn, 2023). Comparative studies of the education systems in Indonesia and Malaysia are crucial for gaining new perspectives that can significantly contribute to the development of education systems in both countries. Through such studies, researchers can identify similarities and differences in curriculum, policies, and pedagogical practices, which can serve as a basis for strengthening the quality of education across countries (Alimin & Muhammad, 2025).

On the other hand, empirical reality shows that Indonesian teachers in Malaysia face complex challenges, ranging from differences in curriculum, adaptation of learning methods, to adjustment to prevailing academic culture and social values. Thus, a significant research gap remains. Few studies have comprehensively examined the role of Indonesian teachers as agents of cross-border education, their pedagogical adaptation strategies, and the socio-cultural implications of their presence on educational development in Malaysia. Therefore, research on this topic is crucial for enriching the academic literature, providing recommendations for cross-border education policies, and strengthening educational cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia in the context of the globalization of Islamic education.

In the context of globalization and the 21st-century educational revolution, this research has novelty, as it examines the adaptive strategies and creativity of Indonesian Arabic language teachers teaching in Malaysia. This century demands superior human resources to compete. One of the competencies students must possess in the 21st century is scientific literacy (Yuliani dkk., 2025). These competencies encompass not only cognitive mastery but also critical thinking skills, cross-cultural communication, and collaborative skills relevant to the needs of a global society. In this regard, the role of teachers is crucial, as they are at the forefront of shaping students' character and learning abilities, enabling them to face the challenges of the times. The current growth of technology and knowledge makes the world feel smaller. This rapid growth has an impact on the formation of a global society (Munastiwi & Marfuah, 2019). This situation demands that teachers creatively adapt to the dynamics of social, technological, and cultural change. For Indonesian Arabic teachers teaching in Malaysia, these challenges are increasingly complex as they face different educational systems, student characteristics, and socio-religious contexts. Therefore, the ability to adapt and innovate in learning becomes crucial. Teachers are required not only to transfer Arabic language knowledge but also to adapt it to the students' local contexts, ensuring that the learning process remains meaningful and relevant. To address this situation, teachers develop adaptive learning models that emphasize method flexibility, the use of digital media, and interactive approaches that incorporate local culture as part of the learning process. This pedagogical creativity is a concrete manifestation of intercultural competence, where teachers not only understand language structures but are also able to build bridges of communication and empathy across cultures.

Education is a deliberate and planned effort to create a learning environment that enables students to actively develop their potential (Rakha Aditya Putra dkk., 2024). Thus, this study not only highlights how Indonesian Arabic language teachers are able to adapt to new environments, but also how their adaptive strategies and creativity can be used as a relevant cross-cultural learning model for global education. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the form of

developing the concept of intercultural pedagogical competence in the context of foreign language teaching abroad, as well as practical contributions to the development of Indonesian teacher training who will teach in international environments. Through the results of this study, it is hoped that a new understanding will emerge about how teachers are able to become agents of change and educational innovation that are not only oriented towards language mastery, but also on instilling global values, tolerance, and cultural adaptation in learning.

The main objective of this study is to explain in depth how Indonesian Arabic language teachers in Malaysia develop adaptive strategies and creativity in facing the challenges of cross-cultural teaching. In today's digital era, education continues to undergo significant transformation, particularly with the integration of technology into the learning process. When it comes to tailoring learning experiences, one approach that has attracted widespread attention is adaptive learning, which aims to tailor learning methods and materials to suit individual students' needs (Dinata dkk., 2024). This concept emphasizes the importance of flexibility in the teaching and learning process, where teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as facilitators who understand the learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and abilities of each student. In the context of Arabic language education in Malaysia, this is particularly relevant given the differences in curricula, educational systems, and diverse student characteristics.

Current conditions require teachers to have the courage to break from established practices, to be out of the box, to break routine, and to be more flexible, thus leading to significant innovations in learning. This is what is known as adaptive learning, or what is often referred to as teachers adapting to the developments and dynamics of the times by continuously creating significant innovations in learning (Lova & Faisal, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to identify the forms of innovation developed by Indonesian Arabic language teachers in Malaysia, both in the use of digital media, the application of creative methods, and in creating a contextual and meaningful learning environment.

Adaptive teachers are expected to be able to adapt Arabic language teaching materials to the local cultural context of students without eliminating the Islamic values that are at the core of teaching the language. Furthermore, this study aims to describe the challenges faced by teachers, both in terms of pedagogical aspects, technology, and cross-cultural interactions. The main challenge in improving the competence of Islamic education teachers is finding a balance between technological adaptation and strengthening spiritual values (Izzah dkk., 2025). In this situation, teachers are required not only to be proficient in utilizing learning technology but also to uphold the Islamic values and spiritual character that underpin Islamic education. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian Arabic language teachers develop adaptive strategies that balance modernity and spirituality, and how their creativity is key to increasing the effectiveness of Arabic language learning in the international arena.

This research has significant theoretical and practical benefits for the development of cross-cultural Arabic language education. Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to enrich and develop the theory of intercultural pedagogical competence, namely the ability of teachers to adapt and communicate effectively amid cultural differences. This is particularly relevant in the context of multicultural education, where Indonesian Arabic language teachers in Malaysia interact with students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, multicultural education becomes a practical platform for intercultural competence, as the two complement each other: multiculturalism emphasizes the recognition of diversity, while interculturalism focuses on the ability to communicate and adapt within that diversity. Multicultural education can provide a more appropriate and accommodating education to children from various cultural backgrounds (Fatmawati dkk., 2023).

Through this understanding, this study seeks to explain how Arabic language teachers are able to adapt their teaching strategies to the social, cultural, and religious diversity that exists in Malaysian educational environments. Thus, the

findings of this study can form the basis for developing new theories regarding how pedagogical and adaptive competencies can function in intercultural and cross-national contexts. Research on intercultural communication in education has explored various aspects such as cultural awareness, language adaptation, and the role of bilingual education. Many studies have emphasized the importance of developing cultural competency among educators to improve communication with students from diverse backgrounds (I Nyoman Tri Esaputra, 2024). In this context, this study makes a theoretical contribution by highlighting how Indonesian Arabic language teachers internalize cultural awareness and adapt their teaching methods to remain effective within the context of the Malaysian education system. This not only broadens understanding of cross-cultural communication practices but also strengthens the relevance of pedagogical approaches that position diversity as a source of educational enrichment.

Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, this research is expected to provide concrete references for educational institutions, teachers, and policymakers in designing training and strategies to improve teacher competency in international environments. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate in one's own language with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Academics have found that explicit cultural instruction, along with learning linguistic principles in language classes, will increase students' intercultural awareness (Permatasari, 2023). Based on this, the research findings can serve as a reference for educational institutions and the government in developing Arabic language teacher training curricula that emphasize cultural adaptation, pedagogical creativity, and the wise use of technology. Furthermore, this research also provides teachers with inspiration to continue innovating in creating inclusive, contextual learning processes that align with Islamic values.

This research focuses on Indonesian Arabic language teachers teaching in Malaysia, particularly in the Islamic education sector, highlighting how they apply adaptive strategies and pedagogical creativity to address the challenges of cross-border and cross-cultural teaching. This focus is crucial because the process of

teaching Arabic is not solely about linguistic competence but also about teachers' ability to understand the differences in social contexts, cultures, and educational systems in the countries where they teach. The education needed today is one that equips students with the skills, abilities, and competencies to face future global competition (Khoiriyah, 2020). Therefore, Indonesian Arabic language teachers are required to adapt their teaching approaches so that they are not only relevant to the Malaysian curriculum but also remain rooted in the Islamic educational values that underpin their knowledge.

In the context of language teaching, the most important aspect is linguistics (Muhammad Yusuf, 2020). This statement demonstrates that successful Arabic language learning is inseparable from the balance between mastery of language structure and understanding of the cultural context in which the language is used. Arabic language teachers teaching in Malaysia, with an Indonesian cultural background, face challenges in bridging cultural differences and student learning habits. For example, differences in how to understand religious texts, classroom communication styles, and learning evaluation methods. Therefore, adaptive strategies are crucial so that teachers can modify teaching methods to suit the characteristics of Malaysian students. Furthermore, almost every educational institution has a teaching method that is appropriate for its students, and not necessarily accepted by other institutions (Talqis Nurdianto & Noor Azizi Bin Ismail, 2020). This means that the diversity of systems and approaches across schools and madrasas in Malaysia requires teachers to be more flexible in implementing learning strategies. Teachers must be creative in designing learning media, managing multicultural classes, and adapting Arabic language materials to make them easily understood by students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, the scope of this research is not only limited to teachers' linguistic abilities but also includes adaptation and innovation efforts in facing pedagogical challenges in the Malaysian Islamic education environment. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how Indonesian Arabic language teachers act as cultural agents and creative professional educators in

strengthening educational relations between countries of the same ethnic group through adaptive and contextual learning practices.

## Methods (منهجية البحث)

This research employed a qualitative case study approach. It focused on the experiences of Indonesian Arabic language teachers in overcoming teaching challenges in Malaysia through their adaptive strategies and creativity in cross-cultural learning activities. The case study approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' lived experiences in the context of Islamic education in Malaysia.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The researcher interviewed three Indonesian Arabic language teachers who had taught in Malaysia at Islamic educational institutions. The three informants were selected purposively with the following criteria: (1) having taught in Malaysia (2) having a background in Arabic language education, and (3) being willing to provide open information about their experiences teaching in Malaysia.

In addition to interviews, researchers also observed online learning activities and language activities related to the informants' experiences. Supporting documentation, such as teaching reflection notes, activity photos, and learning communication results, were also used as additional data sources to strengthen the findings.

The key instrument in this research is the researcher herself, using tools to facilitate the data collection and analysis process. Additional tools used are: (a) a semi-structured interview guide to explore teachers' adaptive strategies and creativity, (b) an observation guide to record the context and situation of cross-cultural learning, and (c) documentation to support the validity of the data.

The research procedures in this study are as follows:

1. The researcher determines the focus of the research and prepares interview guidelines and interview consent sheets.
2. The researcher contacted three informants who met the criteria and asked for their willingness to be interviewed.
3. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews online via Zoom or WhatsApp Call, asking about experiences, strategies, and forms of creativity in teaching in Malaysia.
4. Researchers conducted additional observations of recordings of learning activities and informant reflection notes.
5. Researchers collect supporting documentation relevant to cross-cultural teaching activities.
6. The researchers then conducted data analysis using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana process, which includes four main steps: (1) Collecting data from interviews, observations, and documentation, (2) Integrating data by comparing results between informants, (3) Condensing data by selecting and grouping information based on the theme of adaptive strategies and teacher creativity, and (4) Summarizing data by drawing meanings and patterns of findings from the experiences of informants.

Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely by comparing interview results between informants and matching them with observations and documentation. Researchers also conducted member checking with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with their actual experiences.

## Results & Discussion (نتائج البحث ومناقشاتها)

### Specific Research Overview

This study examines in depth the adaptation experiences, learning strategies, and creativity of Indonesian Arabic language teachers in facing various teaching challenges in Islamic educational institutions in Malaysia. The research focuses on understanding how Indonesian teachers adapt to an educational environment with a system, curriculum, and student characteristics that differ from their home context in Indonesia. Through in-depth interviews with three informants: Muhammad Jundullah Alhaqiqi (UIN SAIZU), Muhammad Ilham (State University of Malang), and Mutia (UIN Jakarta), data were obtained that comprehensively describe the dynamics of adaptation and innovation carried out by these teachers.

In general, the research results indicate that the adaptation process of Indonesian teachers in Malaysia was relatively quick and effective, due to the cultural and linguistic similarities between the two countries. These similarities facilitate teachers' understanding of the customs, social values, and communication ethics of students in Malaysian schools. However, the study also found significant differences in the education system, particularly in the curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and learning styles. For example, students in Malaysia tend to be accustomed to a more structured and formal learning system, requiring adjustments for Indonesian teachers accustomed to a more open and participatory learning environment.

These differences require teachers to be more flexible, reflective, and innovative in developing learning strategies. The speakers revealed that they cannot rely solely on conventional methods such as lectures (teacher-centered learning), but must instead incorporate various student-centered approaches. The most frequently used strategies include active learning, cooperative learning, and a communicative-contextual approach that emphasizes direct interaction with language in real-life situations. Through this approach, students are encouraged to

play an active role in the learning process, whether through group discussions, role-playing, or small project activities relevant to their daily lives.

Beyond strategy, teachers' creativity is also evident in their use of various technology-based and digital learning media. Teachers utilize tools such as interactive PowerPoint, Canva, Wordwall, Kahoot, as well as instructional videos and educational games to foster student learning. These tools serve not only as visual aids but also as enriching and enjoyable learning experiences. For example, one resource person used Wordwall to practice Arabic vocabulary and sentence structure through a competitive, interactive quiz system, while another used Canva to create visually engaging grammar infographics.

This learning innovation is in line with research findings which state that the integration of digital technology and visual media has been proven to increase student motivation and involvement in learning Arabic in the modern era (Alfurochmatin & Jusoh, 2024). In addition, the direction between teachers and students and helps students understand the context of Arabic communication more naturally.

From a social and emotional perspective, Indonesian teachers also face challenges adapting to the academic culture and work ethic of Malaysian schools. While linguistic and religious ties are strong assets, they still need to adapt to the institution's administrative systems, evaluation policies, and expectations regarding learning outcomes. In this context, one teacher stated that "the most challenging aspect is not the language, but the system and the school's high professional expectations." This requires teachers to improve their classroom management skills, time management skills, and digital reporting of learning outcomes through the school's integrated system.

This kind of adaptation aligns with the concept of intercultural pedagogical competence, which emphasizes the importance of teachers' ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences and use them as learning resources. In the case of Indonesian teachers in Malaysia, this competence is evident in how they manage

linguistic and cultural differences as pedagogical opportunities. Teachers not only adapt methods but also build positive interpersonal relationships with students, colleagues, and the school community. In this way, they act as a bridge between two educational systems with similar goals but different approaches.

The results of this study also confirm that pedagogical creativity does not necessarily mean creating something entirely new, but rather the ability to modify and contextualize existing strategies to suit local situations. For example, in teaching muhadatsah (conversation), teachers incorporate elements of local Malaysian culture into speaking practice topics, such as mentioning traditional foods, community activities, or everyday expressions used by students. This makes learning more relevant and understandable, while also enriching students' understanding of linguistic variation in Arabic.

Furthermore, this study found that a collaborative spirit among teachers is also a crucial factor. Indonesian teachers in Malaysia share teaching materials and experiences, both through online discussion groups and local Islamic education forums. This collaboration strengthens professional solidarity and accelerates the adaptation process. In this context, they practice a concrete form of reflective learning, namely evaluating teaching experiences and identifying new strategies for continuous improvement in the quality of learning.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the success of Indonesian Arabic teachers in teaching in Malaysia is greatly influenced by their cultural adaptability, mastery of educational technology, and flexibility in implementing learning strategies. The combination of cultural similarities and pedagogical innovation is key to addressing the challenges of a cross-border education system. In other words, teachers are not merely language instructors but also cultural agents who play a vital role in strengthening educational ties between the two nations.

### **Adaptation to School Systems and Culture in Malaysia**

Adaptation is a key aspect faced by Indonesian Arabic teachers when first teaching in Malaysia. Interviews revealed that all informants emphasized that Islamic schools in Malaysia, such as SMQ and MISS Hulu Langat, have a strong religious atmosphere, with a semi-ma'had or Islamic boarding school system. There, learning activities take place not only in the classroom but also outside of the classroom, from afternoon to evening, as part of the institution's religious routines and customs.

For example, informant Jundullah Alhaqiqi explained that his adaptation involved actively participating in religious activities outside of school hours, such as halaqah (Islamic gatherings) and afternoon activities, as a form of integration with the Islamic boarding school-based education system. This approach demonstrates that teachers must not simply read the syllabus and apply methods in the classroom, but also internalize the institution's spiritual and sociocultural values to integrate with the school's dynamics.

Furthermore, another informant, Ilham (UM), added that adapting to the school system and culture in Malaysia is not too difficult due to similarities with Indonesia in language, Malay culture, and Islamic nuances, although of course there are differences in details. However, he emphasized that sensitivity to local culture and educational policies from the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) is still necessary. Ilham assessed that the Malaysian curriculum has better stability and continuity than Indonesia, which often experiences changes with each change of minister. This implies that teachers coming to Malaysia will face a more stable institutional environment, but must still adapt to the prevailing rules, ethics, and professional culture.

The third informant, Mutia (UIN Jakarta), explained that the adaptation process involved initial observation of student character and institutional culture. She noted that students in Malaysia are polite, orderly, and highly respectful of teachers. This facilitated the teaching process and accelerated adjustment. Adaptation also involved adhering to school etiquette and ethics, such as communication, dress, and behavior within the academic environment. Therefore,

adaptation encompasses not only the technical aspects of teaching but also interpersonal, social, and spiritual aspects.

These findings reinforce Geert Hofstede's view of the importance of cultural awareness and contextual sensitivity in cross-cultural education. In Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, aspects such as power distance in the classroom, collectivism versus individualism, and uncertainty avoidance are important in understanding how teachers and students interact in different educational systems (Kole, 2025). For example, Malaysian students' high level of respect for teachers can be attributed to a relatively large power distance dimension, meaning that the authority structure is clearer and teachers are seen as respected figures.

Furthermore, teacher adaptation in Malaysian Islamic schools requires intercultural competence: teachers must understand the religious-institutional values of the semi-ma'had system, school culture such as afternoon or evening activities, halaqah (Islamic religious gatherings), and official educational policies. A study by Halim shows that foreign teachers who successfully adapt to multicultural schools require empathy, openness, flexibility, and a supportive school environment (Halim dkk., 2024). In this context, Indonesian Arabic language teachers must utilize various adaptation strategies: observation, participation, open communication with the school, and self-reflection on cultural differences.

From an academic perspective, this adaptation can also be seen as a process of acculturation, meaning adjustment to a new culture that is not merely cognitive, but also affective and social. Teachers who are active in religious activities outside of class hours, such as Jundullah, demonstrate that in-depth adaptation (not just superficial) will strengthen teachers' legitimacy within the Malaysian Islamic school environment. This is particularly relevant given that Islamic schools in Malaysia emphasize the integration of spiritual, social, and academic aspects in the curriculum. According to a study in Negeri Sembilan, teachers stated that implementing holistic Islamic education (spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social) requires the readiness of both teachers and the institutional environment (Budiman dkk., 2025).

Implicitly, the results of this interview indicate that when Indonesian Arabic teachers first start teaching in Malaysia, they must view the school environment as a different habitus: not just classrooms and textbooks, but a space of school life that interweaves worship, social interaction, discipline, and religious values. When teachers are able to enter this space with an adaptive attitude and respect for the local culture, the Arabic language learning process can be more effective because teachers and students are on the same wavelength.

Cross-cultural research shows that without cultural competence and contextual awareness, teachers are vulnerable to experiencing “culture shock”, miscommunication, or less than optimal interactions and teaching (Amin & Bidaula, 2024). Therefore, for teachers who will teach abroad, including in Malaysia, it is important to carry out preparations such as studying the culture of the target school, building relationships with local colleagues, getting involved in the institution's non-academic activities, and continuously reflecting on teaching practices.

Thus, the adaptation of Indonesian Arabic teachers in Malaysian Islamic schools is not merely an administrative or technical task, but rather a holistic process encompassing professional, social, spiritual, and cultural aspects. All interviewees agreed that adaptation proceeds more smoothly if teachers are willing to integrate into the system, such as by attending halaqah (Islamic gatherings), adapting their etiquette, and respecting the local culture. These findings provide an important contribution to the literature on cross-cultural education, demonstrating that the semi-ma'had system typical of Malaysian Islamic schools indeed demands a more in-depth adaptation model than regular public schools.

### **Adjustment of Learning Strategies and Methods**

Interviews showed that Indonesian teachers teaching in Malaysia made several adjustments to their learning strategies and methods, particularly in terms

of language use, teaching approaches, and delivery techniques. For example, Jundullah stated that although his methods remained largely unchanged, he made improvements in the way he delivered the material, including his use of Malay to make the message more easily understood by students. He also adjusted his question-and-answer style to be more interactive and communicative, and he also paid attention to subtle differences in Malay and Indonesian vocabulary to avoid miscommunication. More specifically, Jundullah noted that some Malay terms differ in meaning or usage from Indonesian, so he chose words that were more familiar to Malaysian students and emphasized explicit clarification of meaning.

Meanwhile, Ilham emphasized the importance of creativity in packaging teaching materials. He utilizes technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), PowerPoint, Canva, and Wordwall to create more engaging and interactive learning activities. In addition, he uses a game-based formative assessment strategy to measure student understanding at the end of the lesson, a strategy he believes aligns well with the Malaysian curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and active participation. Furthermore, this approach allows students to be more active in discussions, take interactive quizzes, and receive immediate feedback, making the learning process more dynamic.

Furthermore, Mutia implemented active and media-based learning methods as an innovation to the traditional learning system, which previously tended to be mubasyaroh or direct. She introduced tournament games and group-based learning to increase student participation, such as mini-competitions between groups, peer-teaching collaboration, and joint reflection. Furthermore, Mutia also integrated music and technology as a means to strengthen vocabulary memorization. For example, using songs tailored to the learning theme and online quiz applications to strengthen vocabulary mastery in a more enjoyable way.

From the overall interviews, it can be concluded that the three teachers implemented communicative, participatory, and contextual learning strategies in accordance with the principles of modern language learning. This finding aligns with the theory of Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching by Jack C. Richards and

Theodore S. Rodgers, which states that the effectiveness of language teaching depends heavily on the teacher's ability to adapt approaches and methods to the students' social and cultural contexts (Fathi, 2018). This underscores that teachers not only choose fixed methods but also redesign the delivery, media, language, and techniques to suit the characteristics of the learners and the local context. Thus, the adaptation process undertaken by Indonesian teachers abroad reflects a concrete implementation of the concepts of pedagogical and contextual adaptation discussed in the language teaching literature.

### **Challenges and Adaptive Efforts in Teaching**

The main challenges faced by Indonesian teachers in Malaysia include three major interrelated aspects: language differences, limited learning time, and curriculum adjustments. In an interview, Jundullah highlighted the differences in vocabulary between Indonesian and Malay, which led to miscommunication in early interactions with students. He explained that some terms considered common in Indonesia actually have different meanings or usages in Malaysia, requiring a process of familiarization and intensive classroom communication to resolve. Furthermore, Ilham acknowledged that difficulties arise when there are dialect differences between regions in Malaysia, which makes it difficult for some students to understand the Indonesian terms he uses. To overcome this, Ilham uses gradual translation and contextualization techniques by breaking down terms into language more familiar to the students and then relating them to the local context so that students understand the message naturally without losing focus. Meanwhile, Mutia added that another challenge is students' initial resistance to the new, active, media-based learning model, which differs from the traditional, direct "mubasharoh" system. However, after a clear explanation of the activity flow and its benefits, the students showed high enthusiasm. Mutia also revealed that the use of language is another obstacle, which is then overcome through visualization and image association methods in teaching *mufradāt* (vocabulary), so that students can visually associate word forms with their meanings.

In general, the adaptive efforts undertaken by these teachers include strengthening interpersonal communication, implementing a humanistic approach, and developing social interactions outside the classroom such as playing sports together, having casual conversations, and participating in school activities as a means of strengthening teacher-student relationships and helping to "melt" cultural differences. These strategies demonstrate the application of interpersonal competence in accordance with Michael Byram's framework in the theory of "intercultural communicative competence (ICC)", which emphasizes that language learners need not only linguistic abilities, but also an open attitude towards other cultures, knowledge of their own culture and other cultures, and skills to understand and interact in different cultural contexts (Aguilar, 2002).

Thus, these Indonesian teachers not only face structural and linguistic barriers in the teaching environment abroad, but they actively design and implement contextual adaptive strategies, namely adjusting language, methods, social interactions, and learning media so that the teaching and learning process runs more inclusively and effectively in a cross-cultural context. By applying Byram's ICC principles including open attitudes, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness — they successfully minimize barriers and maximize student participation in a multicultural learning environment.

### **Innovation and Creativity in Arabic Language Learning**

#### **Innovation and Creativity in Arabic Language Learning**

Creativity is a key aspect of successful cross-cultural teaching. Research shows that teachers' learning innovations can be grouped into three main categories: the use of technology and learning applications, the application of active and contextual learning models, and the enhancement of learning experiences outside the classroom.

As a concrete approach, Ilham uses applications like Wordwall and AI-based tools to strengthen students' understanding through interactive quizzes and game-based assessments. He also utilizes audio-lingual barcodes found in textbooks published by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) to teach listening skills. Meanwhile, Mutia creates tournament games and songs in Arabic to improve vocabulary memorization. She believes that fun learning can accelerate the process of language internalization. Meanwhile, Jundullah implements an outdoor learning approach with educational games and memorization activities in the school environment, accompanied by a reward and punishment system to maintain student motivation.

These innovations reflect the application of Anna Craft's concept of pedagogical creativity, namely the ability of teachers to create contextual, engaging, and meaningful learning strategies. For example, Craft describes how creativity is now regarded as a core aspect of educating in a school context, which requires teachers to develop adaptive and creative learning (Shaheen, 2010).

Furthermore, this approach is also in line with active learning theory and constructivism theory, which places students at the center of learning, where students do not merely passively receive material but actively construct understanding through interaction, reflection, and real-life experiences. For example, studies show that integrating technology into the classroom with a constructivist framework allows students to learn in context, collaborate, and solve problems more actively (Pratama dkk., 2025).

Thus, the innovation carried out by the teachers above is not just "changing media" or "adding applications", but goes further: designing a learning environment that combines technology, cross-country cultural contexts, relevant media, and activities that trigger student motivation and participation. Approaches such as tournament games or Arabic songs by Mutia, interactive quiz interactions by Ilham, as well as out-of-class learning and reward systems by Jundullah all show that learning has been transformed into a more holistic, contextual and enjoyable experience, in line with modern pedagogical frameworks.

## **Teacher Learning and Self-Reflection**

All three informants emphatically emphasized that their teaching experiences abroad, particularly in Malaysia, had taught them valuable lessons in discipline, professionalism, and time management. For example, Jundullah noted that the structured learning and administrative systems in Malaysian schools require teachers to be more intentional in planning learning activities, organizing schedules, preparing teaching materials and media in advance, and adhering to established deadlines. This, in turn, made him more aware of the importance of careful planning and discipline in implementing each session.

Ilham brought values such as discipline, tolerance, and respect for cultural differences back to the Indonesian educational environment. He recognized that working in a multicultural environment requires teachers to not only understand the learning material but also be sensitive to the customs, norms, and sociocultural uniqueness of their students. This enriched his professionalism as an educator, not just a transmitter of material but also an intercultural facilitator.

Meanwhile, Mutia highlighted the importance of integrating adab (ethics, manners, and discipline) into the learning process, which she said is emphasized more in Malaysia than she was used to in Indonesia. She noted that Malaysian schools often incorporate aspects of adab (ethics, manners, and discipline) into learning routines, such as when welcoming students, during opening and closing sessions, and during teacher-student interactions. Therefore, Mutia recognizes that being a cross-cultural teacher is not just about teaching language or content, but also about building character, etiquette, and strong human relationships.

This reflection shows that cross-cultural experiences not only enrich teachers' pedagogical competence, namely how they choose methods, media, and techniques that are appropriate to the context, but also strengthen professional competence (such as planning, classroom management, cultural tolerance) and personal competence (self-awareness, openness to other cultures, ethics in a global context). Related studies show that teachers' reflections on their teaching

experiences are crucial for their professional development as globally oriented educators. For example, research confirms that Reflective practice (RP) by EFL teachers has been found to have the potential to improve teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies (Rozimela dkk., 2025). In addition, studies in Indonesia show that teachers who systematically reflect are able to adapt their teaching practices in a more diverse and responsive manner to students' needs (Halimi, 2025).

Thus, the experience of teaching abroad, such as that undertaken by Indonesian teachers in Malaysia, becomes a kind of “cultural and professional laboratory” where they are tested and developed not only as teachers, but as educators who are able to adapt to new contexts, maintain professionalism, and manage time and the learning process better.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

Overall, this study reveals that the success of Indonesian Arabic teachers teaching abroad, specifically in Malaysia, depends heavily on three main, complementary factors. The first factor is intercultural adaptability to the local education system and culture. Successful teachers demonstrate their ability to understand and adjust to the norms, customs, and expectations of education in a new environment. For example, they understand that the learning process in Malaysia may differ from that in Indonesia, both in terms of the language of instruction, teacher-student interaction style, and evaluation patterns. Therefore, adaptation is key to maintaining the smoothness of cross-cultural learning. This aligns with the finding that “intercultural competence is the teacher's ability to understand, adapt to, and work effectively in different cultural and linguistic contexts in the pupils' environment.” (Dzerviniks dkk., 2024)

The second factor is pedagogical creativity in developing contextual and engaging learning methods and media. Successful teachers don't just apply a single method, but create new approaches that combine technology, interactive media, and culturally relevant activities for students. Innovations such as educational games,

the use of digital applications, visual media, and out-of-class learning demonstrate the crucial role of teacher creativity in designing The third factor is a reflective and collaborative attitude in building relationships with cross-cultural students. Successful teachers focus not only on material transactions but also recognize the importance of interpersonal relationships, mutual understanding, and intercultural dialogue. They actively reflect on their teaching experiences, learn from mistakes, and collaborate with students and colleagues to create an inclusive learning environment.

These findings support the complementary theory of intercultural and multicultural pedagogical competencies, where language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and instructional innovation play a crucial role in developing adaptive and professional teachers in international contexts. In other words, not only technical teaching skills are required, but also mental and cultural readiness to teach in diverse environments. Success in this context requires teachers to be "cultural crossers" capable of adapting teaching strategies to student characteristics and local conditions, while maintaining professionalism and pedagogical creativity.

## Conclusions (الختامة)

This study shows that Indonesian Arabic language teachers teaching in Malaysia are able to overcome various teaching challenges through adaptive strategies and creativity that reflect intercultural competence. In the context of Malaysian Islamic education, teachers demonstrate the ability to adapt their pedagogical approaches to the local culture and characteristics of their students. Adaptive strategies are reflected in adapting materials to the local cultural context, using flexible learning methods, and building positive communication with students and colleagues. Meanwhile, teacher creativity is evident in innovations in the use of learning media, the application of interactive techniques, and ongoing reflection to improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural Arabic language teaching.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of studies on pedagogical and intercultural competence in foreign language teaching, particularly in the context of Islamic education. Methodologically, this research enriches the application of qualitative methods with a case study approach that emphasizes teachers' real-life experiences in dealing with the dynamics of cross-border learning. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for educators, curriculum developers, and teacher training institutions to strengthen the adaptive abilities and pedagogical creativity of prospective educators who will teach in multicultural environments.

However, this study is limited by the number of informants, consisting of only three Indonesian Arabic language teachers in several Malaysian Islamic educational institutions, which means it cannot fully describe the teaching context. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more participants from various educational levels and regions, and consider students' perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Arabic language teaching practices in cross-cultural environments.

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It is hoped that the results of this research will be beneficial for Arabic language educators, educational institutions, and other parties who are trying to develop adaptive and creative learning strategies in the context of cross-cultural education.

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