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Integration Of Constructivism In Arabic Language Learning In Islamic Universities

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Abstract

This study investigates the integration of constructivist principles in Arabic language learning at the Abuya Salek Sarolangun Islamic Institute (IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun), Indonesia. The research addresses the gap between curriculum planning and classroom implementation in Arabic language instruction within Islamic higher education institutions. Unlike previous studies that mainly discuss constructivism conceptually, this study focuses on the discrepancy between Semester Learning Plans (RPS) and actual classroom practices. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved 25 students and two Arabic language lecturers selected purposively from a population of 60 students. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis over a three-month period. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while data credibility was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. The findings indicate that Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun has not fully integrated constructivist principles. Although lecturers occasionally apply interactive methods such as discussion and inquiry, classroom instruction remains predominantly lecturer-centered and relies heavily on lecturing and memorization. Learning activities have not optimally encouraged students' critical thinking, collaboration, and independent knowledge construction. In addition, assessment practices still focus mainly on cognitive achievement through midterm and final examinations rather than authentic and process-oriented assessment. This study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by proposing a contextual framework for strengthening constructivist learning implementation in Islamic higher education. The findings highlight the importance of curriculum alignment, lecturer professional development, and authentic assessment strategies to support meaningful and student-centered Arabic language learning.

Keywords: Constructivism Approach; Arabic Language Learning; Islamic Higher Education

Introduction

In Arabic Language Education within Islamic higher education institutions, learning is expected not only to develop students' linguistic competence but also to foster critical thinking, independent learning, and meaningful knowledge construction. Arabic language learning requires students to actively engage with texts, interpret meanings, communicate ideas, and solve linguistic problems in authentic contexts. Such learning characteristics align closely with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through inquiry, experience, and

social interaction rather than passively receiving information (Huda, 2020). In this perspective, lecturers serve as facilitators who guide students in exploring, interpreting, and applying knowledge independently (Kartika et al., 2025). Educational institutions, therefore, are responsible for creating learning environments that support students in identifying, formulating, and solving problems autonomously while developing their language skills (Haerullah et al., 2024). Constructivism assumes that knowledge is not merely a fixed reality to be transferred but a product of learners' interpretation and understanding shaped through interaction and experience. Consequently, learning is viewed as an active process of reconstructing meaning through texts, dialogue, collaboration, and real-life experiences relevant to students' academic and social contexts (Azura et al., 2025; Raswan et al., 2022)

Constructivist learning is characterized by several principles, including active meaning-making, continuous knowledge construction, inquiry-based learning, contextual understanding, and the development of critical thinking skills (Alsulami, 2021). Learning outcomes are influenced not only by instructional materials but also by students' prior knowledge, motivation, and interaction with their learning environment. Consequently, constructivist learning encourages student-centered instructional practices that promote collaboration, reflection, and authentic learning experiences (Siregar, 2025).

In the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI), Arabic language learning occupies a strategic position not only as a communication tool but also as an academic instrument for accessing Islamic sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic texts (Rudd, 2019). Therefore, Arabic language learning should encourage students to actively construct meaning, critically interpret texts, and connect learning activities with academic and religious contexts (Ridho & Haq, 2024). However, empirical realities indicate that Arabic language learning in many PTKI environments remains dominated by conventional instructional practices (Setiadi & Marjuni, 2024). Lecturers frequently function as the primary source of information, while students tend to act as passive recipients of knowledge. Such practices potentially limit students' opportunities to develop communicative competence, critical thinking, and independent learning skills (Nismawati & Darmawati, 2025).

A similar situation appears to exist at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun. Preliminary field observations and discussions with lecturers and students suggested several challenges in implementing constructivist principles in Arabic language learning. The observations indicated that instructional materials were primarily developed based on lecturers' teaching experiences rather than systematic analyses of students' learning needs. In addition, contextual Arabic learning materials, digital learning media, student worksheets, and authentic learning resources were limited in availability and utilization. Classroom instruction was predominantly characterized by lecturing, grammar explanation, and translation activities, while inquiry-based tasks, collaborative learning activities, and opportunities for independent knowledge construction were rarely observed.

Initial reviews of Semester Learning Plans (RPS) and preliminary discussions with lecturers and students suggested a possible discrepancy between curriculum planning and classroom implementation. Although several RPS documents included learning outcomes related to critical thinking and active student participation, the instructional strategies and assessment methods remained largely teacher-centered and focused on knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, assessment practices primarily emphasized written examinations and translation assignments, with limited use of authentic assessment, reflective activities, or project-based learning approaches that are consistent with constructivist principles. Preliminary interviews with lecturers and

students also indicated that time constraints, limited instructional resources, and insufficient pedagogical support were among the factors contributing to the continued reliance on conventional teaching practices. These findings suggest a gap between the constructivist orientation expected in higher education learning and its actual implementation in Arabic language classrooms at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun (Mohamad et al., 2021).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the relevance of constructivist principles in Arabic language education. Several studies have emphasized that constructivist learning promotes active participation, collaboration, contextual understanding, and meaningful learning experiences in Arabic language instruction (Haerullah et al., 2024; Syafei, 2024). Other studies have shown that constructivist approaches can be integrated with modern linguistic theories to strengthen students' communicative competence, critical thinking, and language acquisition processes (Ridho & Haq, 2024). More recently, technology-oriented research has highlighted the potential of digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and data-driven instructional frameworks to support constructivist Arabic language learning and learner autonomy (Makinuddin et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies confirm the significant contribution of constructivist pedagogy to improving Arabic language instruction. While these studies have enriched the understanding of constructivist Arabic language learning, they provide limited insight into how constructivist principles are operationalized across interconnected educational processes in higher education settings.

Despite these contributions, existing studies tend to focus on specific aspects of constructivist Arabic language learning rather than examining its implementation as a comprehensive pedagogical system. Research on constructivist learning environments mainly highlights student engagement and classroom interaction, while studies integrating linguistic theories remain largely conceptual in nature. Similarly, technology-oriented studies primarily focus on digital tools and instructional innovations without sufficiently addressing the alignment between curriculum planning, classroom implementation, and assessment practices. Consequently, there is still limited empirical evidence regarding how constructivist principles are systematically enacted across these interconnected dimensions within Islamic higher education institutions.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine how constructivist principles are integrated into Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focused on conceptual discussions of constructivist pedagogy, experimental evaluations of specific instructional models, or the integration of digital technologies into Arabic language learning, this study investigates constructivism as a comprehensive pedagogical system. Specifically, it explores the alignment between curriculum planning as reflected in the Semester Learning Plans (RPS), classroom instructional practices, and assessment systems within the context of an Islamic higher education institution in regional Indonesia. This focus enables a more holistic understanding of how constructivist principles are translated from educational policy and curriculum design into actual teaching and learning practices.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated analysis of planning, implementation, and assessment dimensions of constructivist Arabic language learning within a PTKI context that remains underrepresented in the literature. Rather than examining a single instructional strategy or technological intervention, this study investigates how constructivist principles operate across interconnected educational processes. In addition, the study seeks to formulate practical pedagogical implications for strengthening constructivist-oriented Arabic language instruction in similar PTKI settings. Given the strategic role of Arabic language education in Islamic higher education and the limited empirical evidence regarding comprehensive constructivist implementation, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the

development of more meaningful, contextual, and student-centered Arabic language learning. Based on this background, the research question guiding this study is: “How are constructivist principles integrated into Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun?”

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the integration of constructivist principles in Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014; Rokmana et al., 2025). A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of a contemporary educational phenomenon within its real-life context. Specifically, the design enabled the researchers to examine how constructivist principles were reflected across three interconnected dimensions of Arabic language learning, namely curriculum planning as documented in the Semester Learning Plans (RPS), classroom instructional implementation, and assessment practices. By focusing on a single institutional case, the study provided a holistic understanding of the alignment between intended curriculum, teaching practices, and assessment processes in the context of Islamic higher education.

The study was conducted at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun. Participants consisted of 25 undergraduate students enrolled in Arabic language courses during the 2025/2026 academic year and two lecturers responsible for teaching the courses. The student participants were selected through purposive sampling from a population of 60 students based on their active participation in classroom learning activities, discussions, and academic assignments related to Arabic language learning. The lecturers were selected because they were directly involved in curriculum planning, classroom instruction, and assessment practices, which constituted the primary focus of this study. The participants represented students from the second and fourth semesters who had experienced Arabic language learning under the existing instructional system. The selection of 25 students and two lecturers was considered sufficient for this qualitative case study because the objective was not statistical generalization but an in-depth exploration of constructivist learning practices within a bounded educational context. The sample size enabled the researchers to obtain rich and detailed information from multiple sources while maintaining analytical depth and contextual understanding.

Data were collected over a three-month period from January to March 2026 through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted during three Arabic language learning sessions involving second- and fourth-semester students to examine classroom instructional practices, lecturer-student interactions, student participation, and the implementation of constructivist learning principles. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two Arabic language lecturers and 25 student participants, with each interview lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. The interviews explored participants’ perspectives and experiences regarding curriculum planning, instructional strategies, classroom implementation, assessment practices, and challenges in applying constructivist approaches to Arabic language learning. Document analysis was employed to complement and triangulate the findings obtained from observations and interviews. The analyzed documents included two course syllabi, four Semester Learning Plans (RPS), assessment instruments, samples of student assignments, and photographic documentation of learning activities. The use of multiple data sources enabled a comprehensive understanding of how constructivist principles were integrated into Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun.

Data analysis followed a descriptive-analytical procedure, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, to identify patterns and meanings related to the application of

constructivism in Arabic language learning. The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through methodological and source triangulation, which enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that the Arabic language learning process at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun does not yet fully utilize an integrated learning model with a constructivist approach. This is evident in the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning carried out by some lecturers. Lecturers still dominate as the source of information in learning, while students are passive recipients of information. Learning does not yet take into account the experiences of students and only takes place in the classroom.

Classroom observations revealed that lecturers occupied most of the instructional time through explanations of grammar rules, vocabulary, and translation exercises. During one observed session, approximately two-thirds of the learning time was devoted to lecturer explanations, while student participation was largely limited to responding to direct questions. As noted in the observation field notes,

“Students listened to the lecturer’s explanation and recorded key points, with only a few students contributing to classroom discussions” (Observation Note 2, February 2026).

This pattern was further confirmed by a student participant who stated:

“Most of the time, we listen to the lecturer’s explanation and complete assignments. Opportunities for discussion and independent exploration are still limited” (Student Interview S-07).

One lecturer acknowledged that lecture-based instruction remained dominant due to limited instructional time and students’ varying levels of Arabic proficiency. As stated by Lecturer L-01,

“The lecture method is still frequently used because it allows us to cover the required material within the available class time” (Lecturer Interview L-01).

Planning for Arabic language instruction at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun was primarily reflected in the development of Semester Learning Plans (Rencana Pembelajaran Semester/RPS), which were prepared by lecturers based on institutional syllabi and national higher education standards. Most of the analyzed RPS documents followed the structure required by the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Regulation No. 44 of 2015.

Analysis of four Semester Learning Plans (RPS) indicated that learning outcomes emphasized critical thinking, communication, and active participation. However, the learning activities described in the RPS were predominantly limited to lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and assignments. Only one RPS explicitly included collaborative discussion activities, while none incorporated inquiry-based projects, reflective journals, or problem-based learning tasks that are commonly associated with constructivist pedagogy.

Classroom observations indicated that lecturers generally organized learning activities systematically through preliminary, core, and closing stages. During the preliminary stage, lecturers prepared students for learning, provided motivational support, and activated prior knowledge through questioning activities. However, observation data showed that the RPS mainly functioned as a guide for selecting learning materials and instructional methods, while the sequence of learning activities outlined in the RPS was not consistently implemented during classroom instruction.

In general, lecturers have carried out the learning process systematically by conducting preliminary activities, core activities, and closing activities. However, each of these activities is

carried out using different learning strategies and models.

The comparison presented in Table 1 summarizes the extent to which observed instructional practices reflected constructivist learning principles.

Table 1. Comparison of Traditional and Constructivist Learning in Arabic Language Instruction

Aspect	Traditional Learning	Constructivist Learning	Condition at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun
Lecturer's role	Main source of information	Facilitator of learning	Lecturer-dominated instruction
Students' role	Passive recipients	Active constructors of knowledge	Relatively passive
Learning methods	Lecturing and memorization	Inquiry-based learning and reflective discussion	Predominantly lecturing
Learning resources	Textbooks	Diverse and contextual resources	Limited resources
Interaction pattern	One-way interaction	Dialogic and collaborative interaction	Limited interaction
Assessment	Cognitive-based testing	Authentic and process-oriented assessment	Focus on mid-term and final exams

As shown in Table 1, most observed practices were closer to traditional instructional characteristics than to constructivist learning principles, particularly regarding lecturer roles, student participation, interaction patterns, and assessment practices.

During the assessment stage, lecturers use an assessment system that refers to Islamic Higher Education Institution (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam/PTKI) policies, including independent assignments, midterm exams, and final exams. The assessment applied still focuses on cognitive aspects, while the assessment of processes and authentic language skills has not been developed systematically. Overall, the results of the study indicate that although the learning models and strategies used vary, their implementation does not yet fully reflect student-centered learning as emphasized in the constructivist approach.

Document analysis of assessment plans and grading sheets showed that student evaluation primarily relied on individual assignments, midterm examinations, and final examinations. Across the analyzed courses, the majority of the final grade was allocated to written examinations and content mastery tests. No assessment rubrics were found for reflective journals, portfolios, project-based assignments, peer assessment, or self-assessment activities. These findings suggest that assessment practices remained predominantly product-oriented and cognitive-focused rather than emphasizing learning processes and authentic language performance.

The models and strategies applied in Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun vary, but the models used are not yet fully integrated with the constructivist approach. The majority of lecturers still use lecture or memorization methods, where learning is centered on the lecturer rather than the students and does not involve students to be active in learning. Observation and interview data suggested that opportunities for creativity, collaborative problem-solving, and independent knowledge construction were still limited, as learning activities were largely centered on lecturer explanations and textbook-based exercises.

Overall, the findings indicate that constructivist principles were only partially reflected in Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun. Although lecturers had developed

Semester Learning Plans (RPS) and implemented various instructional strategies, classroom practices and assessment systems remained largely lecturer-centered and focused on cognitive achievement rather than active knowledge construction and authentic learning processes.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun does not fully reflect the principles of constructivist learning, particularly in terms of lecturer roles, student participation, instructional methods, learning resources, interaction patterns, and assessment practices. The findings reveal a substantial gap between the ideals of constructivist learning and the actual instructional practices observed in Arabic language classrooms.

Based on Table 1, the role of lecturers in Arabic language learning is still dominant as the main source of information. This condition contradicts the constructivist view that places lecturers as facilitators, mediators, and mentors in the learning process. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge is not transferred directly from lecturers to students, but is actively constructed by students through learning experiences and social interactions (Febriani & Zainuddin, 2024). This interpretation is consistent with the observation findings, which showed that approximately two-thirds of classroom instructional time was devoted to lecturer explanations, while student participation was largely limited to responding to direct questions.

Furthermore, the relatively passive role of students also reinforces the indication that the application of the constructivist approach is not yet optimal. Students are not given enough space to explore ideas, relate the material to their previous learning experiences, and build understanding independently. In fact, constructivism emphasizes that learning is an active process of constructing meaning, not merely memorizing facts or language structures (Aisah & Furqoni, 2024). When students are not actively involved, the process of internalizing and transforming knowledge becomes less than optimal.

From the perspective of learning methods, the results of the study indicate that lectures and memorization are still the most dominant strategies used by lecturers. Although there are variations in methods such as question and answer sessions and group discussions, their implementation has not fully encouraged inquiry-based and reflective learning. In constructivist theory, learning methods should emphasize exploratory activities, problem solving, reflective discussion, and collaboration among students (Abri et al., 2024). Reliance on lecture methods has the potential to limit students' critical thinking and creativity in Arabic language learning.

Limited learning resources are also a factor hindering the integration of constructivism in Arabic language learning. Research findings show that learning resources are still dominated by textbooks, with minimal use of contextual and authentic learning resources. In constructivist learning, diversity of learning resources is very important to help students relate the material to real contexts and their life experiences (Mohamad et al., 2021). Limited learning resources can hinder the process of meaningful and contextual knowledge construction.

In terms of interaction patterns, Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun still tends to be one-way, with limited interaction between lecturers and students as well as among students. However, constructivism emphasizes the importance of dialogic and collaborative interaction as a means of negotiating meaning and developing understanding (Nurhadi & Hilmi, 2022). The lack of dialogic interaction means that learning does not provide enough space for students to express their opinions, ask critical questions, and build a common understanding.

The assessment aspect also shows a tendency that is not yet in line with the principles of constructivism (Saputri et al., 2024). Arabic language learning assessment still focuses on cognitive

tests through midterm and final exams. Authentic assessment and process assessment, such as portfolios, performance, and project-based assessment, have not been developed systematically. In a constructivist approach, assessment should not only measure final results, but also the learning process and students' ability to apply knowledge contextually (Fadhilah, 2025).

Overall, the results of this study are in line with previous findings which state that the application of constructivism in language learning, especially in higher education, still faces obstacles at the implementation level (Kafi et al., 2024). Although conceptually lecturers are familiar with various learning models and strategies, classroom learning practices are still dominated by traditional approaches. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to integrate constructivist principles into the planning, implementation, and assessment of Arabic language learning so that learning becomes more meaningful, contextual, and student-centered.

From a broader pedagogical perspective, the limited integration of constructivist principles in Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun can also be understood as a reflection of institutional and cultural factors within higher education. Lecturers' reliance on lecture-based methods may stem from long-standing academic traditions, limited professional development opportunities related to innovative pedagogy, and constraints in instructional resources. These factors collectively influence how learning theories are translated into classroom practices.

The findings of this study suggest that successful integration of constructivism requires not only individual lecturer initiative but also systemic support from institutions. This includes structured training on constructivist pedagogy, curriculum alignment that explicitly encourages student-centered learning, and the availability of diverse and contextual learning resources. Without such support, constructivism may remain a theoretical discourse rather than a lived classroom practice (Syifa & Fahrezi, 2025).

Moreover, the integration of constructivism in Arabic language learning holds significant implications for students' academic and cognitive development. Constructivist-oriented learning can foster students' autonomy, critical thinking, collaboration, and communicative competence, which are essential skills in higher education. When students are actively involved in constructing knowledge, Arabic language learning becomes more meaningful and relevant to their academic disciplines and future professional roles.

Conclusion

This study examined how constructivist principles are integrated into Arabic language learning at IAI Abuya Salek Sarolangun. The findings reveal a substantial gap between the constructivist orientation reflected in curriculum planning and its implementation in classroom practices and assessment systems. Although lecturers developed Semester Learning Plans (Rencana Pembelajaran Semester/RPS) that included learning outcomes related to active participation, critical thinking, and communication, classroom instruction remained largely lecturer-centered, with limited opportunities for inquiry, collaboration, and independent knowledge construction. Assessment practices were also predominantly focused on cognitive achievement through assignments and examinations, with limited use of authentic and process-oriented assessment.

These findings indicate that constructivist principles have only been partially integrated into Arabic language learning at the institution. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the alignment between curriculum planning, instructional practices, and assessment within the context of Islamic higher education. The findings underscore the need for stronger alignment among these dimensions through the implementation of student-centered learning strategies, authentic assessment practices, and institutional support to strengthen

constructivist-oriented Arabic language learning in similar PTKI contexts.

This study was limited to a single institution and a relatively small number of participants. Future research is recommended to involve multiple institutions, larger participant groups, and diverse methodological approaches to provide a broader understanding of constructivist Arabic language learning across different Islamic higher education contexts. Such studies may further contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable constructivist-based Arabic language learning practices.

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