



PROCEEDINGS

International Conference on Education
Faculty of Tarbiyah | UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri
E-ISSN: 3025-6828

Volume 3, 2025

Integrating Arabic Culture into Arabic Language Learning in the Digital Age: A Study of Generation Z Muslims

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Abstract:

As Generation Z emerges as digital natives, it is necessary to update learning methods to be relevant and utilize the digital technologies that are part of their lives. How is Arabic culture active in the realm of Arabic language learning? The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a literature study approach. Data were collected from secondary sources such as scientific publications, digital Arabic learning materials, and relevant previous research reports, without directly involving participants. The results show that Generation Z considers cultural learning through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube more authentic and contextual than conventional teaching materials such as textbooks. Using news accounts, educational content, videos, and interaction in digital forums is a common practice. The findings imply a shift in the role of educators from the primary source of knowledge to content curators and facilitators of cross-cultural discussions. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop hybrid teaching materials that integrate the richness of classical content with the relevance of contemporary media to create more effective learning.

Keywords: Arabic Culture; Arabic Language Learning; Era Digital; Generation Z

Article History:

Received : 28 July 2025

Revised : 15 September 2025

Accepted : 20 November 2025

Introduction

Every country has unique cultural traits and personalities that set it apart. A society's language can be influenced by its culture. People can communicate their culture, ideas, thoughts, habits, customs, and way of life through language (Nurfasilah et al. 2024). Because of their intimate relationship, language and culture are inextricably linked and cannot be separated. A country's language is a reflection of its culture and civilisation (Isa et al. 2024).

The integration of Arabic culture in Arabic language learning is very important and complex. Language learners cannot only focus on the ability to communicate or understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, but also require an understanding of the culture that underlies the language (Amzaludin et al. 2023). An intercultural approach helps students gain a deeper understanding of the beliefs, values, and customs of Arab society, which are all essential for meaningful and successful communication. The relationship between language and culture is like a symbol and meaning; learning Arabic without being accompanied by its culture will not succeed effectively, as if learning a symbol without meaning (Akmaliyah et al. 2021). So, integrating Arabic in Arabic language learning has many benefits, including increasing student motivation, developing language skills, and character building (Podolsky et al. 2019).

The presence of Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, who are accustomed to digital technology and often referred to as "digital natives," whose presence has a major impact on the way humans work, think, and interact with technology. So, it requires education to update the way of learning and teaching with innovation and creativity. Utilizing technology can create a more interesting and fun learning environment. So that students are more motivated to learn Arabic and understand the cultural values contained therein (Chickering and Ehrmann, n.d.).

Digital-based learning, such as online platforms, learning applications, and smart devices, can be used to present learning materials. Students can more easily gain a more thorough understanding of Arabic culture by accessing Arabic language movies, social media content, or even speaking directly with native speakers of the language or Arabic language learning communities around the world (Li and Lan 2022). Cultural knowledge and learning experiences can be enhanced with the help of technology. This enriches the reinterpretation process with a more global and contextual approach (Pan 2023).

The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding based on various points of view obtained from the review of the literature collected for Arabic language learners regarding the importance of integrating Arabic culture in Arabic language learning and utilizing various digital platforms available to create more effective and enjoyable learning. And from this, it is hoped that language learners can maintain cultural and intellectual sustainability in Arabic language learning.

Methods

This study combines a literature review methodology with a qualitative descriptive technique. Data related to the research topic is gathered and analysed by researchers from a variety of literary sources. to investigate different viewpoints and deepen comprehension of how Arabic culture is incorporated into the social environment of digital learning from the viewpoint of Muslim students in Generation Z, as well as how visual culture is represented in terms of renewal and transmission. According to the literature review, this study uses secondary data from already published scientific works rather than directly involving participants. Literature reviews, including scientific journals, digital Arabic learning resources, and previous research papers relevant to the study's topic, are among the main sources of data. This study aims to clarify and

demonstrate Gen Z's perspective on including Arabic cultural elements into online Arabic language training.

Results and Discussion

Generation Z Learners in the Context of Education

Digital platforms such as social media, streaming platforms, educational platforms, and educational apps can be used to dynamically revive local culture. Generation Z, known as digital natives, utilize technology not only to consume global culture, but also as a medium to promote and preserve their authentic culture through creative forms of content such as cultural vlogs, virtual heritage tours, and modern visual narratives (Akhsan and Muhammadiyah 2020).

Technology has broken down geographical barriers and made space for minority cultures to appear in digital public spaces, creating a more equal ecosystem of cross-cultural interaction. Generation Z, which includes individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, exhibits unique characteristics as learners in the digital age. They grow up in a technology-laden environment, which influences their lives in accessing, processing, and interpreting information in the learning process (Uluum 2025). The primary traits of Generation Z learners are their propensity for multitasking, affinity for visual-interactive learning, and rapid rate of technological adaptation (Sapri Sapri et al. 2023).

In the context of education, Generation Z shows a preference for flexible, technology-based, and personalized learning methods. They are more interested in microlearning, short learning videos, and blended learning models that combine online and offline learning dynamically (Yusuf and Simpuru, forthcoming). These interaction patterns tend to be horizontal, favouring collaborative discussions over conventional one-way learning patterns (Handriawan and Handriawan 2015).

In addition, Generation Z also demands the relevance of teaching materials to real life in a global context. Generation Z is more responsive to actual issues, sustainability, and social problems that are part of their digital identity. However, the challenge of building focus and deep learning is a critical issue, given the high exposure to information overload in the digital world.

Gen Z Muslim Identity Construction

Media technology also opens up opportunities for learning that allow students to explore Islamic ideas according to their rhythm and preferred learning methods. It develops creativity and critical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze and understand religious texts using interactive media.

Generation Z Muslims grow up in a social environment characterized by strong global interconnections, driven by the development of digital technology and social media. This phenomenon gives rise to new dynamics in the process of identity construction, where Islamic religious values are internalized and expressed alongside the influence of global culture that increasingly dominates the virtual space.

The Gen Z Muslim identity construction process is no longer linear or bound to homogeneous local norms, but rather develops through transnational identity negotiations. Social media is an important arena for them to present their Islamic identity creatively, for example, through modest fashion, digital da'wah content, and participation in social movements based on universal Islamic values such as social justice and sustainability (Sumiarni 2016).

Rather, this process remains in tension between the conservatism of old values and the desire to express freer individuality. Muslims of Generation Z often create a selected identity model, including aspects of world culture that are thought to be consistent with Islamic principles, while contextually redefining religious limits (Ayunda et al. 2025).

The rise of Muslim influencers who portray themselves as role models with a more approachable and informal communication style than traditional religious leaders also have an impact on this type of identity creation (Waliyuddin 2024). This phenomenon reflects a shift in authority in the authentication of Islamic values among Gen Z.

Domination of Classical and Religious Cultural Content in Teaching Materials

Arabic teaching materials in Indonesia, especially at the formal education level, tend to be dominated by content sourced from classical culture and religious texts. This tendency is a reflection of the long history of learning Arabic with an emphasis on studying religious texts, Islamic historical narratives, and classical works (turats) (Albarracín, 2018). The emphasis on classical writings is seen as both a means of internalising religious ideals and an attempt to maintain the authenticity of the Arabic language.

However, the dominance of this content presents challenges in the context of the needs of the current generation of learners, who are more open to global dynamics and demand contextual relevance in the language learning process. Teaching materials that are too focused on classical texts often do not accommodate the communicative aspects and functional language skills needed in modern social interactions, both in academic and professional environments (Ibrahim 2013).

In addition, the tendency of the curriculum to make religious culture the only narrative framework in Arabic learning materials also affects the narrowness of students' multiculturalism insights (Mualif 2022). Nonetheless, in addition to conveying Islamic identity, Arabic is an international language that is used as a communication tool in many domains, such as science, business, and diplomacy.

There is an urgent need to update teaching materials with an integrative approach. This involves creating content that combines classical texts with modern discourses, including news, scientific articles, and global issues related to education. In this way, Arabic language learning can be more contextualized, communicative, and in line with the profile of 21st-century students.

Technology as a Gateway to Authentic Culture

Digital technology has completely changed how people access, investigate, and understand culture. Amid globalization, which is often accused of creating cultural homogenization, technology acts as a gateway that opens wider access to authentic cultural diversity, both in the form of practices, values, and narratives that have been marginalized. This creates a greater sense of cultural identity among the younger generation and creates prospects for the resurgence of traditional cultural practices in interactive digital formats (Carr, 2020).

There are also difficulties, though, particularly about the potential for monetisation of genuine culture, which loses its original context of meaning as a result of simplification or stereotyping on digital platforms (Jamil and Agung, 2021). Digital cultural literacy is, therefore, necessary to ensure that technology use is focused on authentic and sustainable cultural preservation rather than just becoming a fad for mass consumption.

Recent research shows that the Generation Z population feels that they gain a more genuine and contextualized understanding of culture through social media than traditional teaching materials, such as textbooks (Nurfasilah et al. 2024). Textbooks typically present culture in the form of descriptive, rigid narratives that are often disconnected from actual social dynamics. In contrast, social media offers interactive,

real-time, and more diverse representations of culture, which can create a more thorough understanding of culture (Cornelia and Sulistyaningrum, 2023). Through videos, posts, and live interactions, learners can see and hear language in real contexts, understand unwritten social norms, and witness cultural diversity not described in textbooks.

According to Chickering and Ehrmann, technology may effectively communicate visuals and engage students in "direct, indirect, and virtual experiences." Additionally, they assert that technology enables students to participate in tasks that call for higher-order abilities like application, evaluation, synthesis, and analysis (Chickering and Ehrmann, n.d.). In addition, technology encourages self-reflection, self-evaluation, collaboration, and group problem-solving. Second language acquisition can be aided by learning environments that pedagogically incorporate digital and internet media.

The content presented through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube allows users to witness cultural practices firsthand, whether in the form of videos of daily life, local traditions, or ongoing popular culture phenomena. This reinforces the perception that social media offers a more "live" and less theoretical cultural learning experience (Abdul Sakti, 2023).

Looking at the current reality, informal learning processes through social media provide legitimate and objective educational experiences to learners, especially Gen Z, using social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter), because they can satisfy their desire to engage in innovative teaching methods, use platforms with functionality that goes beyond VLE software, and eliminate concerns around privacy and confidentiality (Syarofi and Syuhadak, 2023).

Informal learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and skills that takes place outside the framework of formal and non-formal education, is flexible, and is driven by an individual's interests. In the digital era, social media such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have developed into significant informal learning mediums for Generation Z, with characteristics of high accessibility, attractive visualization, and participatory interaction models.

Arabic Language Learning Technology Platform

Digital technology has become a key medium for language learners to access materials flexibly and informally. Some common practices by Generation Z learners include:

1. Following Arabic News Accounts on Social Media Arabic learners can utilize Arabic news accounts on social media (Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube, TikTok) as informal, contextual, and authentic learning resources. This is exposed to new concepts, phrase patterns, and linguistic styles in authentic contexts by watching news reports.



Figure 1. News Arabic

2. Follow Educational Accounts on Instagram

In addition to news accounts, many Arabic language learners also utilize educational accounts on Instagram that specifically create Arabic learning content in a light, visual,

and interactive manner. These accounts usually present material in the form of daily understanding, idioms, grammar tips (nahwu-sharf), to interactive quizzes, such as arabiyahtalks, yallarabic, pba_ummy, pba_faiumm, pbauinam, pbauinrilofficial, mahfuzat.alyaum, baitul.arabiyah, shababbelajaracademy.id, marhaban.academy, yayaanbisa, and so on.



Figures 2. Arabic Video Contents

3. Watching Videos with Arabic/Indonesian Subtitles

With the use of websites like YouTube or Netflix, students can view films, documentaries, or vlogs with Arabic and Indonesian subtitles. Students who use videos to study Arabic communication are encouraged to read, listen intently, practise, and investigate what they see and hear. This aids in vocabulary development and helps them comprehend the cultural context. Videos often reflect the cultural aspects, customs, and values of Arabic-speaking societies. Subtitles help learners understand the narration and dialogue related to the cultural context (Mushoffa 2023).



Figure 3. Arabic Language Film

4. Interaction in Digital Forums or Communities

Through applications such as Discord, Reddit, or Facebook Groups, learners can discuss directly with native speakers, broadening their cultural horizons while practicing practical communication skills. Discussions in these online environments often center on contemporary issues or shared interests, encouraging learners to apply the language in various socially and culturally relevant scenarios. This enriches the understanding of language pragmatics.

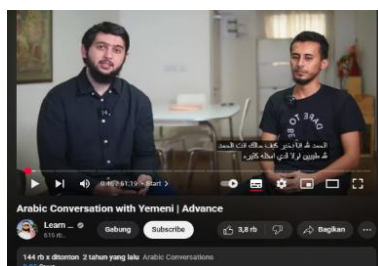


Figure 4. Arabic Conversation



Figure 5. Podcast Arabic

5. Follow Influencers or Arabic Educational Content

Educational accounts on TikTok and Instagram that teach Arabic through short videos are effective and desirable informal learning media, due to their light and contextual approach (Ida Alinda Fathonah et al. 2024). Influencers often present material in a more dynamic, interactive, and entertaining format. This approach has the potential to reduce perceived learning difficulties and increase learner engagement (Aunur Shabur Maajid Amadi and Dina Wilda Sholikha, 2023). Some influencers organize Q&A sessions or interact directly with their followers, which offers limited opportunities for language practice or clarification.

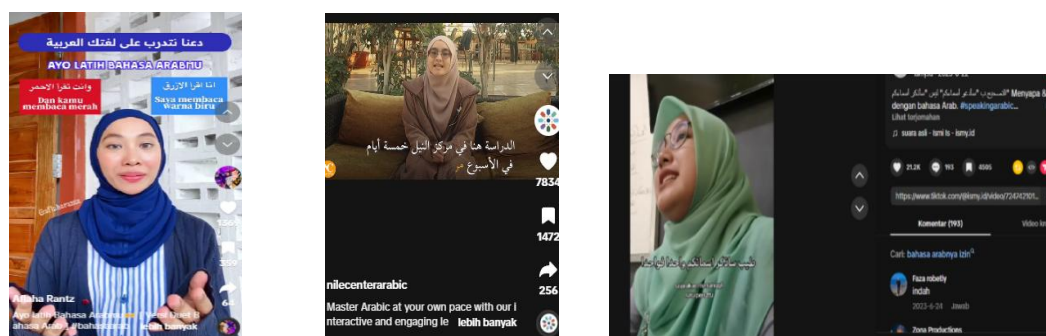


Figure 6. Educational Video

Conceptualization of Teacher Roles and Teaching Materials

The paradigm shift in education demands a fundamental reconceptualization of the roles of teachers and teaching materials. The two no longer function as separate or static entities, but rather as dynamic components that interact and adapt with each other in creating effective and relevant learning experiences, following the role of educators in the Z era:

a. Shifting Role of Educators

The transformation of the educational landscape in the digital era has triggered a fundamental shift in the role of teachers. Teachers are no longer solely the primary source of knowledge, but have evolved into content curators and facilitators of cross-cultural discussions (Arham et al. 2024). This change reflects an adaptation to the abundant availability of information and the need to develop 21st-century competencies. Traditionally, educators were regarded as the exclusive source of information, primarily responsible for delivering knowledge from the curriculum to learners. In this paradigm, access to information was limited, and the role of the teacher as a material provider was crucial. However, with the proliferation of digital resources and the accessibility of the internet, information can now be accessed instantly by anyone (Wahid 2024). This phenomenon demands a change in the way teachers interact with knowledge and students.

One of the crucial roles of teachers is to be content curators. This involves Source Selection and Validation by being responsible for selecting and validating credible, relevant, and accurate learning resources from various digital platforms. This helps students navigate the abundance of information and differentiate between high-quality content and poorly vetted information (Loh and Kanai 2016). Historically, educators were seen as the sole providers of information, mainly tasked with imparting knowledge from the curriculum to students. Personalized learning requires teachers to understand students' individual needs, and teachers can curate content tailored to their learning

styles, comprehension levels, and interests. This enables more personalized and effective learning.

b. Implications for the Development of Hybrid Teaching Materials

The finding that Arabic language learners get more "real" cultural images through social media than conventional textbooks has significant implications for the future development of teaching materials. This shift highlights the urgent need to design hybrid teaching materials that effectively blend the richness of classical content with the relevance of contemporary content. This hybrid model will not only ensure the completeness of linguistic and cultural understanding but also increase learner motivation and engagement (Handayani 2024). This approach not only maintains the continuity of scholarly values but also ensures the relevance of open materials to the needs of learners in the digital era. Hybrid materials allow learners to see how the target language and culture are used in real daily life. For example, through social media, learners can be exposed to slang or regional dialects that are not in textbooks, making learning feel more alive and relevant to their world (Mahmudah et al. 2024).

In Arabic language instruction, combining traditional and modern content is essential due to the advantages of social media and the drawbacks of conventional approaches. The necessity of bridging the gap between classical and modern forms is implied by this examination of the potential and difficulties of Arabic language development in the Industrial 4.0 era. Through the use of classical texts and a hybrid approach, students can learn about the linguistic and cultural foundations of Arabic while also being introduced to how these elements are expressed in contemporary settings. In addition to improving language comprehension, this gives students comprehensive, relevant, and up-to-date cultural viewpoints.

Challenges for Language Learners in the Age of Technology

Digital technologies alter brain structure and function through neuroplasticity. Digital multitasking, instant notifications, and fast-paced visual content can strengthen neural pathways that support quick responses but interfere with the ability to maintain focus and think deeply (Greenfield 2015). Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to perform structural and functional reorganization in response to learning, new experiences, or neural damage. These changes occur through the formation of new synapses and the strengthening of existing neural connections.

Recent studies have shown that attention span has decreased significantly in the last decade. Microsoft (2015) found that the average human attention span reduced from 12 seconds in 2000 to only 8 seconds in 2013, lower than a goldfish. The main cause is the rapid and constant exposure to digital content, which forms the habit of constantly shifting focus. In addition, the generation that grew up with digital technology shows an increased capacity to process visual information and switch tasks, but also tends to experience difficulties in sustaining prolonged and deep attention (Bavelier and Green 2019). This suggests an adaptive shift of the brain, but also the risk of losing traditional cognitive skills.

The use of digital devices, particularly social media and visual-based apps, encourages fast, concise, and often multitasking patterns of information consumption. These conditions reinforce the brain's neuroplasticity in forming surface-level or superficial information processing habits. As a result, Generation Z tends to experience a decrease in long-term attention span and relies more on instantaneous processing rather than deep cognitive processing (Loh and Kanai 2016).

However, by using adaptive digital learning methodologies, neuroplasticity also creates favourable prospects. Cognitive capacity can be realigned to deeper learning pathways when people are trained using techniques that promote critical thinking and

focused attention. Therefore, rather than just catering to consumption preferences, educators play a significant role in creating learning environments that may leverage the flexibility of neuroplasticity to foster critical thinking abilities.

Conclusion

Arabic language learning in the digital era, especially for Generation Z, demands a shift from conventional methods dominated by classical and religious content towards a more dynamic and relevant hybrid approach. Generation Z, as digital natives, are inherently more motivated and gain a more authentic and contextualized understanding of Arabic culture through digital platforms such as social media (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) compared to traditional textbooks. This phenomenon drives a fundamental shift in the role of educators, from being the sole source of knowledge to becoming content curators and facilitators of cross-cultural discussions. Educators are required to be able to select, validate, and integrate a variety of credible digital sources into teaching materials. Therefore, the development of hybrid teaching materials that combine the richness of classical texts with contemporary content from digital media is an urgency. This approach not only increases students' engagement and motivation to learn but also equips them with a comprehensive, functional, and timely understanding of the Arabic language and culture. However, there are challenges related to changes in the way the brain works due to digital technology (neuroplasticity), such as decreased attention span. This underscores the important role of educators in designing learning environments that can utilize technology to hone critical thinking skills, rather than simply accommodating the rapid and superficial consumption of information.

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