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The Arabic for Specific Purposes Approach in Enhancing Students' Competence in Reading Kitab Kuning at Islamic Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract (10pt)
This study aims to examine the implementation of the Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP) approach in enhancing students' competence in reading kitab kuning at Islamic higher education institutions. The issue addressed in this study stems from the mismatch between general Arabic language instruction and students' specific academic needs in understanding classical Islamic texts. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving lecturers and students of Islamic studies programs selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, meanings, and dynamics in the implementation of the learning process. The findings reveal three main results: (1) a reorientation of Arabic language learning objectives toward the needs of reading kitab kuning; (2) an increased sense of relevance and functionality of Arabic for students in understanding classical texts; and (3) the presence of pedagogical and linguistic challenges addressed through contextual learning strategies. These findings contribute to strengthening ASP studies within the context of academic Islamic Arabic. Practically, the results highlight the need for curriculum development and Arabic language learning policies that are more closely integrated with students' academic needs. Future research is recommended to explore the implementation of ASP through comparative and longitudinal approaches.

Keywords: Arabic for Specific Purposes, kitab kuning reading competence, Islamic higher education

مستخلص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة تطبيق نهج اللغة العربية للأغراض الخاصة (ASP) في تعزيز كفاءة الطلاب في قراءة الكتب الصفراء في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الإسلامية. تنبع القضية التي تتناولها هذه الدراسة من عدم التوافق بين تعليم اللغة العربية العامة والاحتياجات الأكاديمية الخاصة للطلاب في فهم النصوص الإسلامية الكلاسيكية. تستخدم هذه الدراسة نهجًا نوعيًا مع تصميم دراسة حالة. تم جمع البيانات من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة وملاحظات في الفصول الدراسية وتحليل الوثائق بمشاركة محاضرين وطلاب برامج الدراسات الإسلامية الذين تم اختيارهم من خلال عينة موجهة. تم تحليل البيانات حسب الموضوع لتحديد الأنماط والمعاني والديناميات في تنفيذ عملية التعلم. كشفت النتائج عن ثلاث نتائج رئيسية: (١) إعادة توجيه أهداف تعلم اللغة العربية نحو احتياجات قراءة الكتب الصفراء؛ (٢) زيادة الإحساس بأهمية ووظيفة اللغة العربية للطلاب في فهم النصوص الكلاسيكية؛ و (٣) وجود تحديات تربوية ولغوية يتم معالجتها من خلال استراتيجيات التعلم السياقية. تساهم هذه النتائج في تعزيز دراسات ASP في سياق اللغة العربية الإسلامية الأكاديمية. من الناحية العملية، تسلط النتائج الضوء على الحاجة إلى تطوير المناهج الدراسية وسياسات تعلم اللغة العربية التي تتكامل بشكل أوثق مع الاحتياجات الأكاديمية للطلاب. يوصى بإجراء أبحاث مستقبلية لاستكشاف تنفيذ برنامج ASP من خلال نُهج مقارنة وطولية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة العربية لغرض محدد، كتاب كينينغ، الكفاءة في القراءة، التعليم العالي الإسلامي

Introduction

Arabic language learning in the context of Islamic higher education, both globally and nationally, has experienced a shift in orientation from structural mastery toward the fulfillment of learners' specific academic and professional needs. In language education studies, the Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP) approach has emerged as a response to the limitations of general Arabic instruction, which often fails to align with students' contextual needs, particularly in understanding classical Islamic scholarly texts (Albantani & Madkur, 2019; Ritonga et al., 2022). In many Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, the ability to read and comprehend kitab kuning remains a core competency, especially for students in Islamic studies programs. However, learning outcomes are often suboptimal when instruction relies on general, grammar-oriented, and decontextualized approaches to Arabic.

Empirical evidence from academic reports and field observations indicates that students face significant difficulties in reading kitab kuning, including limited thematic vocabulary, weak comprehension of classical syntactic structures, and low ability to relate texts to their respective disciplinary contexts (Hidayah, 2021; Sobhan & Ritonga, 2023). Qualitative findings from interviews with lecturers and students at several Islamic higher education institutions suggest that Arabic language learning is often not specifically directed toward the needs of reading turāth texts, but rather remains oriented toward general curriculum targets and rule-based mastery. This condition results in a gap between the objectives of Arabic language instruction and students' actual academic needs.

This issue is crucial to examine because reading kitab kuning is not merely a matter of linguistic competence but also concerns the transmission of Islamic knowledge, the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions, and the development of students' academic reasoning in Islamic higher education (Manaf & Shariffadeen, 2025). From social and cultural perspectives (Moreira et al., 2023), kitab kuning serves as the primary medium for transmitting Islamic scholarly authority; therefore, failure to comprehend these texts directly affects the overall quality of Islamic education (Mahfud et al., 2022). Consequently, a more contextual, functional, and goal-oriented

instructional approach has become an urgent necessity in Arabic language teaching at the tertiary level (Borham et al., 2024). This approach is expected to enhance students' understanding of kitab kuning texts and strengthen their ability to apply Islamic knowledge in practical contexts (Manaf & Shariffadeen, 2025). More interactive and practice-based learning methods can also create a more engaging and effective learning environment for students in comprehending kitab kuning (Siam, 2023). Furthermore, the integration of innovative and collaborative instructional methods may serve as a solution to increase students' interest and comprehension while maintaining the relevance of Islamic scholarly traditions (Aref & Rahman, 2024).

Although numerous studies have examined Arabic language learning in higher education, most have focused on media development, technological integration, or general language skill improvement (Ritonga et al., 2022; Albantani & Madkur, 2019). There remains a limited number of studies that deeply explore the meanings, experiences, and processes of implementing Arabic for Specific Purposes in enhancing students' competence in reading kitab kuning from the perspectives of learning actors. Thus, a literature gap exists regarding how the ASP approach is practiced, interpreted, and internalized within the context of kitab kuning instruction in Islamic higher education.

Based on this background, this study aims to qualitatively examine the Arabic for Specific Purposes approach in enhancing students' competence in reading kitab kuning. The focus of the study is directed toward learning processes, pedagogical strategies, and the experiences of lecturers and students in implementing this approach. Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening ASP scholarship within the context of academic Islamic Arabic, while practically, it is expected to serve as a reference for curriculum development and Arabic language learning strategies that are more contextual and needs-oriented in Islamic higher education institutions.

Arabic language learning in Islamic higher education cannot be separated from students' specific academic needs, particularly in understanding classical Islamic scholarly texts (kitab kuning). In language education studies, the Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP) approach evolved from the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) paradigm, which emphasizes alignment among learning objectives, materials, and

methods with learners' actual needs (Hyland, 2020). ASP views language not merely as a system of rules but as a functional instrument used to fulfill specific academic, professional, and disciplinary needs. Therefore, Arabic instruction for reading kitab kuning requires a contextual approach, grounded in authentic texts and aligned with the characteristics of classical Arabic.

Conceptually, ASP is defined as an Arabic language learning approach designed based on the analysis of learners' linguistic and academic needs within specific fields (Ritonga et al., 2022). In the context of this study, these needs relate to the ability to comprehend classical syntactic structures, thematic vocabulary in Islamic sciences, and the discourse patterns of turāth texts. The operational indicators of ASP in kitab kuning reading instruction include: (1) relevance of materials to the texts studied; (2) emphasis on academic-Islamic language functions; (3) the use of contextual reading strategies; and (4) the integration of language learning with students' disciplinary fields. This approach aligns with needs-based learning theory, which positions learners' needs as the primary foundation for instructional design (Hyland, 2020).

Competence in reading kitab kuning refers to the ability to accurately and contextually understand unvowelled classical Arabic texts at lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels. According to Sobhan and Ritonga (2023), reading kitab kuning requires not only mastery of nahwu and ṣarf rules but also the ability to interpret textual meaning based on scholarly context and classical writing traditions. Accordingly, indicators of reading competence include understanding sentence structures, semantic relations between phrases, identifying technical disciplinary terms, and drawing conclusions from textual content. The ASP approach is considered relevant because it integrates linguistic aspects and disciplinary contexts simultaneously.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of specific-purpose approaches in Arabic language learning at the tertiary level. Ritonga, Sobhan, and Bambang (2022) found that Arabic instruction aligned with students' academic needs was more effective in enhancing comprehension of Islamic texts than general approaches. Similarly, Sobhan and Ritonga (2023) emphasized that needs-based

approaches increase students' motivation and understanding of academic Arabic texts. Another study by Albantani and Madkur (2019), although slightly earlier, remains relevant in highlighting the strategic necessity of contextual Arabic instruction in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

Nevertheless, most of these studies have focused primarily on effectiveness or model development, with limited exploration of experiences, processes, and meanings associated with implementing ASP in kitab kuning instruction from lecturers' and students' perspectives. Moreover, studies that explicitly position kitab kuning as the central domain of ASP remain relatively scarce. Therefore, an empirical and theoretical gap exists concerning how the Arabic for Specific Purposes approach is practiced, negotiated, and interpreted within the context of kitab kuning instruction in Islamic higher education.

Based on this discussion, the present study positions the ASP approach as the primary theoretical framework for analyzing kitab kuning reading instruction. The conceptual framework assumes that alignment between learning objectives, students' academic needs, and the characteristics of kitab kuning texts influences the quality of instructional processes and reading competence outcomes. A qualitative approach is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of learning processes, pedagogical strategies, and participants' experiences in implementing ASP.

Thus, this theoretical framework affirms that the Arabic for Specific Purposes approach represents a relevant and strategic perspective for enhancing students' competence in reading kitab kuning. This framework serves as the basis for data analysis in explaining the relationship between instructional approaches, pedagogical processes, and the development of contextual and meaningful Islamic text reading competence.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design. The selection of a case study is based on the research objective of gaining an in-depth

understanding of the processes, strategies, and experiences involved in implementing the Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP) approach to enhance students' competence in reading kitab kuning within a specific institutional context. The case study design enables holistic exploration of learning phenomena in real-life settings by emphasizing meaning and interaction dynamics among lecturers, students, and instructional materials (Yin, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted at a public Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia that institutionally positions kitab kuning instruction as a core competency for students in Islamic studies programs. The study took place over one academic semester in 2024. Research participants included lecturers teaching Arabic language or kitab kuning courses and active students enrolled in these courses. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) lecturers who implement goal-oriented Arabic instruction and (2) students who had attended the courses for at least one semester. To enrich the data, snowball sampling was employed to identify additional relevant informants (Palinkas et al., 2020).

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore lecturers' and students' perspectives, experiences, and instructional strategies related to ASP implementation. Participant observation allowed direct examination of classroom processes, interactions, and teaching methods. Documentation included syllabi, lesson plans, teaching materials, and student assignments related to kitab kuning instruction. The use of multiple techniques aimed to obtain rich and comprehensive data through methodological triangulation (Flick, 2020).

Data validation employed several qualitative trustworthiness strategies, including source and method triangulation, member checking, and audit trails. Source triangulation involved comparing data from lecturers and students, while method triangulation compared interview, observation, and documentation data. Member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary findings and interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy. Audit trails were used to systematically document all research processes to ensure transparency and traceability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing conducted cyclically and continuously (Miles et al., 2020). Interview data were transcribed and coded to identify key themes related to the ASP approach and kitab kuning reading competence. The analysis process was iterative from data collection to conclusion, enabling the identification of patterns, relationships, and meanings in depth.

Result and Discussion

Result

Based on the analysis of data from in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, this study found that the implementation of the Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP) approach in kitab kuning reading instruction created a more contextual, functional, and academically needs-oriented learning model. This approach was not perceived merely as replacing general Arabic materials, but as a paradigm shift from abstract rule-based instruction toward disciplinary-based textual meaning-making. The findings indicate that lecturers consciously adjusted learning objectives, materials, and instructional strategies to align with the characteristics of kitab kuning used in the courses.

The first theme identified was the recontextualization of Arabic language learning. Lecturers no longer positioned nahwu and ṣarf as ultimate learning goals, but as tools for understanding textual meaning. One lecturer stated, "I do not demand that students memorize rules, but that they understand why certain structures are used in the text" (Lecturer 1). Classroom observations showed that instruction began with kitab kuning texts, followed by gradual analysis of structure and meaning. This approach increased student engagement as learning became more relevant to their academic needs.

The second theme concerned strengthening kitab kuning reading competence based on disciplinary needs. Students reported that selecting texts aligned with their fields of study (fiqh, hadith, or tafsir) helped them better understand terminology and discourse patterns. One student explained, "When the text matches my major, I understand it faster because I frequently encounter the terminology" (Student 3). This

finding was supported by lesson plan documentation showing adjustments of instructional materials according to students' study programs.

The third theme involved challenges in implementing the specific-purpose approach, including heterogeneous student backgrounds, limited instructional time, and the absence of formal ASP-based curricular guidelines. Several lecturers acknowledged that this approach largely depended on individual initiative. "There is no official guideline yet, so it depends on each lecturer's creativity" (Lecturer 2). This condition indicates that ASP implementation remains partial and has not yet been institutionally formalized.

Discussion

The findings affirm that the Arabic for Specific Purposes approach plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between Arabic language instruction and students' academic needs in understanding kitab kuning. The recontextualization of learning aligns with the ASP paradigm, which positions language as a functional tool for specific purposes rather than an object of study (Hyland, 2020). This supports the argument that Arabic instruction in Islamic higher education should be directed toward fulfilling students' real academic needs.

The results are consistent with Ritonga et al. (2022), who found that needs-based Arabic instruction enhances comprehension of Islamic texts. However, this study extends previous research by deeply exploring lecturers' and students' experiences during the learning process rather than focusing solely on outcomes or effectiveness. Thus, this research offers a process-oriented perspective that remains underexplored in Arabic ASP studies.

The strengthening of kitab kuning reading competence through discipline-based text selection indicates that comprehension of classical texts is strongly influenced by disciplinary proximity. This finding aligns with Sobhan and Ritonga's (2023) assertion that specific academic needs should guide Arabic instructional design. In the socio-academic context of Islamic higher education, kitab kuning texts are embedded within specific scholarly traditions that require contextual understanding.

From a pedagogical perspective, the ASP approach shifts the lecturer's role from rule transmitter to facilitator of textual meaning. This is consistent with constructivist learning approaches emphasizing active student participation in meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Students in this study demonstrated increased participation and confidence when learning was directly linked to their academic needs.

Nevertheless, the identified challenges highlight structural limitations in ASP implementation. The absence of formal curricular guidelines causes heavy reliance on individual lecturer capacity. This contrasts with contexts reported by Hyland (2020) in Western ESP settings, where established curricula commonly support specific-purpose instruction. This difference underscores the importance of contextualizing ASP theory within Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions.

Culturally, kitab kuning instruction carries strong traditional dimensions; therefore, new approaches such as ASP must be implemented adaptively to avoid conflict with established academic and religious values. This study shows that ASP does not negate tradition, but rather strengthens textual understanding through more systematic and contextually relevant approaches.

Practically, the findings imply the need for ASP-based Arabic curriculum development integrated with kitab kuning courses. Lecturer training in ASP instructional design is also essential to ensure sustainable implementation. Theoretically, this study expands ASP scholarship into the domain of kitab kuning instruction, which has traditionally been examined from conventional perspectives.

The study's limitations include its single-institution scope and limited number of participants. Future research may employ multi-site or mixed-methods designs to examine the consistency of findings across contexts. Longitudinal studies may also provide insights into the long-term impact of ASP implementation on students' reading competence.

Overall, the findings confirm that the Arabic for Specific Purposes approach offers a relevant and contextual pedagogical framework for enhancing students' competence in reading kitab kuning. By integrating academic needs, disciplinary

contexts, and Islamic educational traditions, this approach holds strong potential for improving Arabic language education quality in Islamic higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP) approach plays a strategic role in enhancing students' competence in reading kitab kuning at Islamic higher education institutions. The main findings indicate a reorientation of Arabic language learning from general linguistic objectives toward specific academic needs, positioning Arabic as a functional instrument for understanding classical Islamic texts. This approach not only increases learning relevance but also strengthens students' confidence, engagement, and contextual comprehension in reading kitab kuning.

Theoretically, this study enriches ASP scholarship by affirming that ASP within the kitab kuning context constitutes a multidimensional pedagogical construct integrating linguistic, contextual, and cognitive aspects. The findings extend existing literature by highlighting learning processes, classroom dynamics, and participant experiences rather than focusing solely on instructional effectiveness. Consequently, this study contributes conceptually to the development of academic Islamic Arabic learning theory.

Practically, the findings imply the need for Arabic curriculum and instructional strategies more closely integrated with students' kitab kuning reading needs. Lecturers are encouraged to adopt contextual and needs-based approaches, while Islamic higher education institutions are expected to provide policy support and adequate resources for sustainable ASP implementation. At the policy level, this research can inform the formulation of more adaptive Arabic language curricula aligned with students' academic demands.

This study recommends that future research expand its scope through comparative institutional studies or longitudinal designs to examine long-term development of students' reading competence. Additionally, the development of kitab kuning instructional materials grounded in the Arabic for Specific Purposes

approach represents an important agenda for strengthening learning practices and deepening understanding of Arabic–Islamic studies integration in higher education.

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