

Arabic Dictionary Utilization As A Tool For Language Skill Enhancement Among Santri: A Structured Literature Review

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Abstract

The development of Arabic language proficiency among santri remains a crucial issue in Islamic boarding school education, particularly due to ongoing challenges in vocabulary acquisition, text comprehension, and learner autonomy. Although Arabic dictionaries both traditional and digital have long been used as learning aids, their pedagogical role has not been systematically examined. This lack of synthesis limits a comprehensive understanding of how dictionary use contributes to the development of core language skills (mahārah lughawiyah), including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. To address this gap, the study employs a structured literature review guided by the PRISMA protocol. Empirical and conceptual studies were systematically collected from major academic databases, focusing on dictionary utilization in Arabic language learning, especially within Islamic or comparable educational contexts. The selected literature was analyzed thematically to identify patterns of use, instructional strategies, and learning outcomes. The findings indicate that Arabic dictionaries serve functions beyond simple word lookup. Their use supports vocabulary growth, enhances reading comprehension, improves writing accuracy, and strengthens lexical and metalinguistic awareness. Furthermore, dictionaries particularly digital and monolingual ones promote learner autonomy and self-regulated learning when integrated into guided instructional practices. The review concludes that Arabic dictionaries should be reconceptualized as strategic pedagogical tools within pesantren-based Arabic education, offering a foundation for future research and instructional innovation.

Keywords: Arabic dictionary use; Mahārah lughawiyah; Santri

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language proficiency is a foundational component of Islamic education, particularly in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), where Arabic functions not only as an academic subject but also as the primary medium for accessing religious sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic texts. Mastery of Arabic is therefore essential for *santri* to engage meaningfully with Islamic scholarship. Despite its importance, research consistently shows that Arabic language acquisition among *santri* faces persistent challenges, most notably limited lexical competence. Insufficient vocabulary knowledge constrains text comprehension, written accuracy, and oral communication, ultimately hindering the development of comprehensive language skills (Maimuna and Taufiqurrahman 2022).

From a second and foreign language acquisition perspective, lexical competence is widely recognized as a key predictor of overall language proficiency. Vocabulary knowledge underpins reading comprehension, supports grammatical accuracy, facilitates listening comprehension, and enables fluent spoken production. In Arabic learning contexts, lexical acquisition is particularly challenging due to the language's morphological richness, root-based derivational system, diglossic nature, and the frequent use of classical texts with dense and abstract vocabulary (Taufiqurochman and Mustaqim 2023). These characteristics often lead learners to rely on translation and surface-level processing, limiting deeper linguistic engagement and learner autonomy.

In response, Arabic language pedagogy has explored various instructional approaches, including communicative language teaching, text-based instruction, task-based learning, and digital integration. Parallel research on vocabulary learning strategies has emphasized inferencing, morphological awareness, contextual learning, and repetition. Within this pedagogical landscape, dictionaries printed or digital, monolingual or bilingual

remain among the most frequently used learning resources. However, they are often narrowly conceptualized as tools for retrieving word meanings rather than as integral components of language learning processes (Sanusi 2022).

In broader second and foreign language research, dictionary use is increasingly viewed as a complex cognitive activity. Empirical studies indicate that effective dictionary use promotes deeper lexical processing, enhances semantic and morphological awareness, and supports meaningful connections between form, meaning, and context. The development of digital dictionaries and mobile applications has further expanded these affordances through features such as contextual examples, collocations, pronunciation models, and usage notes, enabling more active engagement with lexical information and supporting self-directed learning (Rizqia 2022).

Despite these developments, research on dictionary utilization in Arabic language learning remains fragmented and contextually limited. Many studies focus on general foreign language or higher education settings, often prioritizing English. Research specific to Arabic learning tends to emphasize grammar, reading, or curriculum design, with dictionary use treated as a peripheral variable (Yusuf 2024). Moreover, studies rarely account for the distinctive characteristics of *santri* education, which integrates linguistic instruction with religious practices, traditional pedagogies, and intensive engagement with classical texts.

This lack of contextual specificity represents a significant limitation. *Pesantren* education is shaped by unique learning cultures, including collective text study, memorization, and teacher-centered instruction, alongside growing exposure to modern pedagogical approaches. In such contexts, dictionaries may function not merely as reference tools but also as mediators between classical and contemporary Arabic forms. However, existing research does not offer a coherent understanding of how dictionaries operate

pedagogically within *pesantren*-based Arabic education (Rahmawati and Liana 2024).

This fragmentation highlights a critical gap in the literature: the absence of a structured synthesis examining the types of Arabic dictionaries used, the strategies through which they are employed, and their documented impact on *santri*'s language skills. Addressing this gap requires a theoretically grounded approach. Lexical Competence Theory emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge involves form, meaning, use, and semantic relationships dimensions that dictionaries are well positioned to support. Cognitive Tool Theory further conceptualizes dictionaries as cognitive artifacts that mediate how learners process and retain linguistic information. Additionally, Self-Regulated Learning theory highlights the role of strategic resource use in fostering learner autonomy (Khuluq and Imamah 2025).

Despite the relevance of these perspectives, no structured literature review has integrated them to examine dictionary utilization in Arabic language learning among *santri*. Existing studies remain isolated and offer limited guidance for pedagogy and curriculum design, particularly in light of the growing availability of digital lexicographical resources (Ulin 2024).

Accordingly, this study addresses this gap by conducting a structured literature review of research on Arabic dictionary utilization in contexts relevant to *santri* education. Guided by an analytical framework integrating lexical competence, cognitive tool, and self-regulated learning theories, the review aims to map dictionary types, identify pedagogical strategies, analyze reported effects on Arabic language skills particularly vocabulary development, reading comprehension, writing accuracy, and learner autonomy and highlight directions for future research. By synthesizing empirical and conceptual evidence, this study seeks to reconceptualize

dictionaries as cognitive and pedagogical tools and to inform more effective Arabic language instruction in *pesantren* and comparable educational settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a Structured Literature Review using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) framework guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol. This design ensures methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility in synthesizing research on Arabic dictionary utilization in language learning, particularly within *santri* and Islamic educational contexts. A structured review is appropriate given the fragmented nature of existing studies and the lack of an integrated framework addressing dictionary use in Arabic pedagogy (Miles 2020).

Unlike narrative reviews, the PRISMA-guided SLR enables systematic identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and synthesis of relevant literature while minimizing selection bias. Both empirical and conceptual studies were included to capture the pedagogical and cognitive roles of dictionaries in Arabic language learning (Creswell 2021). The literature search was conducted across five databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, DOAJ, and SINTA. These databases were selected to ensure comprehensive coverage of international and regional research in applied linguistics, Arabic language education, and Islamic education. Scopus and Web of Science provided globally indexed studies, ERIC contributed education-focused research, while DOAJ and SINTA captured open-access and regionally relevant publications.

A systematic search strategy employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators, including Arabic dictionary, dictionary use, lexicography, vocabulary learning, Arabic language learning, Arabic as a foreign language, Islamic education, and *santri*. Searches were adapted to each database and limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English or Indonesian within the last 5–10 years.

Studies were included if they: (1) focused on Arabic language learning or teaching; (2) examined dictionary use (printed or digital, monolingual or bilingual) as a central pedagogical variable; (3) involved *santri*, Islamic educational institutions, or comparable Arabic-as-a-foreign-language contexts; and (4) met the publication time frame. Studies focusing on non-Arabic languages, treating dictionaries only incidentally, lacking methodological transparency, or consisting of unpublished works were excluded. The selection process followed the four PRISMA stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Titles and abstracts were initially screened, followed by full-text evaluation to ensure relevance and methodological quality. The final set of eligible studies constituted the review corpus.

Data were extracted using a structured coding framework capturing publication details, research design, learning context, dictionary type, instructional strategies, and reported learning outcomes. Analysis combined thematic and conceptual synthesis. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns related to vocabulary development, reading comprehension, writing accuracy, and learner autonomy. Conceptual synthesis interpreted these themes through Lexical Competence Theory, Cognitive Tool Theory, and Self-Regulated Learning (Sugiyono 2021). Given methodological diversity, no meta-analysis was conducted. Instead, the review prioritized conceptual coherence and pedagogical relevance. As a literature-based study, no ethical approval was required; however, academic integrity was ensured through accurate citation and transparent reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section synthesizes the findings of the structured literature review on Arabic dictionary utilization as a tool for enhancing language skills among *santri* (Malkan, Jannah, and Kasyfuddin 2023). The results are organized

thematically around four core dimensions: types of dictionaries used, pedagogical functions, impacts on Arabic language skills, and contextual characteristics of *santri* education. This structure reflects the central analytical logic of the review, emphasizing the relationship between dictionary type, pedagogical mechanisms, and learning outcomes.

Types of Arabic Dictionaries Utilized

Across the reviewed studies, three dominant categories of Arabic dictionaries are identified: monolingual Arabic dictionaries, bilingual Arabic–Indonesian dictionaries, and digital or application-based dictionaries. Each type demonstrates distinct pedagogical affordances and usage patterns (Atikah and Fauji 2022). Monolingual Arabic dictionaries are commonly associated with advanced lexical development and deeper semantic processing. Studies indicate that these dictionaries encourage learners to engage directly with Arabic definitions, synonyms, and morphological information, thereby promoting target-language thinking and reducing reliance on translation (Robbani and Romadhoni 2025). Their use is typically reported in higher-level classes and in *pesantran* with strong linguistic traditions, where *santri* engage intensively with classical texts.

Bilingual Arabic Indonesian dictionaries remain the most widely used resources, particularly among beginner and intermediate learners. The literature highlights their role in facilitating initial comprehension, reducing cognitive load, and enabling rapid access to meaning. However, several studies caution that excessive dependence on bilingual dictionaries may reinforce surface-level processing if not accompanied by pedagogical guidance (Alhafidz 2023).

Pedagogical Functions of Dictionary Use

Beyond typological distinctions, the reviewed studies reveal several recurring pedagogical functions that position dictionaries as integral components of instructional and cognitive processes. The most frequently reported function is vocabulary enrichment. Dictionary use supports the development of both receptive and productive vocabulary by enabling learners to explore meanings, derivatives, and semantic relationships. Studies emphasize that when dictionary consultation is embedded within structured tasks, such as guided reading or writing, it promotes durable lexical retention rather than isolated memorization (Rochim et al. 2025).

A second major function concerns reading comprehension (*qirā'ah*). Dictionaries frequently serve as scaffolding tools during reading, particularly when learners encounter dense or unfamiliar vocabulary in classical or academic Arabic texts. Dictionary-supported reading enables learners to move beyond literal translation toward contextual interpretation, a function especially salient in *pesantren* where engagement with *kutub turāth* is central (Mawardī, Mustafa, and Musdalifa 2024).

Impact on Arabic Language Skills

The reviewed studies provide converging evidence regarding the impact of dictionary utilization on Arabic language skills, particularly reading comprehension, writing accuracy, and learner autonomy (Sarah et al. 2024). Learner autonomy emerges as a further significant outcome. Many studies emphasize that dictionary use fosters self-regulated learning behaviors, including independent problem-solving, strategic resource use, and reflective learning. Digital dictionaries, in particular, are associated with increased learner confidence and initiative, as *santri* can access lexical information independently without constant teacher mediation. This autonomy aligns

closely with *pesantren* educational values emphasizing discipline and self-directed study (Qalbi, Mutaqqien, and Mulyana 2023).

***Santri* Learning Contexts: Institutional and Instructional Variations**

The effectiveness of dictionary utilization is shaped by contextual factors related to *santri* education. The literature distinguishes between *salaf* (traditional) and modern *pesantren*, as well as between formal and nonformal learning settings (Mardiyah et al. 2025). In *salaf pesantren*, dictionary use is often embedded within traditional collective reading practices. Dictionaries are typically monolingual or classical and mediated by teachers or senior students. While this approach supports deep textual engagement, it may limit independent exploration unless autonomy is explicitly encouraged (Rahman and Hamzah 2025).

Modern *pesantren* demonstrate greater integration of bilingual and digital dictionaries within formal classroom instruction. These institutions tend to adopt structured pedagogical approaches, incorporating dictionary use into planned activities and assessments. Such integration is associated with enhanced skill development and learner autonomy (Mustofa and Rosyidah 2025). Differences also emerge between formal instruction and nonformal learning contexts, such as independent study. In nonformal settings, dictionary use is more exploratory and self-directed, reinforcing its role as a tool for lifelong learning.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Arabic dictionaries play a far more substantive role than traditionally assumed. Rather than functioning merely as word-lookup tools, dictionaries actively mediate lexical development, textual comprehension, and learner autonomy. Dictionary use is pedagogically effective because it promotes deeper cognitive engagement with lexical items.

Across studies, dictionary consultation encourages semantic analysis, morphological awareness, and contextual understanding. From a cognitive perspective, dictionaries reduce uncertainty while prompting learners to pause, reflect, and integrate new lexical information into existing knowledge structures. This process aligns with informed vocabulary learning models emphasizing intentional attention to form–meaning relationships(Nation 2020).

Alignment with Second Language Acquisition Theory

The findings align closely with established SLA theories. From an Input Processing perspective, dictionaries facilitate noticing and processing of linguistic input by making unfamiliar items comprehensible. The Depth of Processing Hypothesis explains why dictionary use enhances retention: consultation often involves elaborative processing through definitions, examples, and word families (Ellis 2020). From a sociocognitive perspective, dictionaries function as mediational tools that extend learners' cognitive capacity. This mediating role is particularly salient in Arabic learning, given its morphological complexity and lexical density.

Implications for Arabic Language Pedagogy

The review reinforces the need to balance grammatical instruction with lexical development in Arabic pedagogy. Dictionaries emerge as strategic resources capable of addressing this imbalance. When integrated thoughtfully, dictionaries support vocabulary growth, reading comprehension, and writing accuracy without displacing traditional practices(Robbani and Romadhoni 2025). Digital dictionaries expand pedagogical possibilities by providing multimodal input and supporting autonomy. However, technology alone does not guarantee learning gains; teacher mediation remains essential.

Dictionaries as Mediating Learning Artifacts

A key theoretical contribution of this review is the reconceptualization of dictionaries as mediating learning artifacts. Drawing on Cognitive Tool Theory, the findings show that dictionaries shape how learners process, interpret, and produce language. This mediating role is particularly evident in the development of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning behaviors (Taufiqurochman and Mustaqim 2023). The review is limited by the dominance of qualitative and short-term studies, restricting causal inference and longitudinal insight. Research specifically focused on *pesantren* remains limited (Creswell 2021). Future studies should employ experimental and longitudinal designs, compare guided and unguided strategies, and explore learner training in dictionary skills. Such research will strengthen the evidence base for dictionary-based pedagogy in Arabic language education.

CONCLUSION

This structured literature review synthesizes existing research on Arabic dictionary utilization as a tool for enhancing language skills among *santri*. The findings consistently indicate that dictionaries play a significant and multifaceted role in Arabic language learning. Rather than serving merely as passive reference tools, dictionaries function as cognitive and pedagogical instruments that support lexical acquisition, facilitate text comprehension, improve writing accuracy, and promote learner autonomy. Through systematic engagement with lexical resources, *santri* are better able to navigate the linguistic complexity of Arabic and engage more actively in the learning process.

At a conceptual level, the review demonstrates that effective dictionary use strengthens lexical competence, which underpins broader language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Dictionary-supported learning encourages deeper lexical processing by directing learners' attention

to form–meaning relationships, morphological structures, and contextual usage. This depth of processing explains why dictionary use is consistently associated with improved reading comprehension and more accurate language production. However, the findings also emphasize that the pedagogical impact of dictionaries is highly dependent on instructional integration. Guided and strategic dictionary use produces stronger learning outcomes than unguided consultation, which often results in superficial vocabulary processing. The relevance of dictionary use is particularly evident in *pesantren* contexts, where *santri* regularly engage with classical Arabic texts characterized by dense vocabulary and complex morphology. When embedded in structured instructional activities such as guided reading and writing tasks, dictionary use supports sustained vocabulary development and enables greater learner independence. These practices complement traditional teaching approaches by equipping learners with tools to independently interpret and produce Arabic texts.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are substantial. Dictionaries should be explicitly incorporated into curriculum design, classroom activities, and assessment practices rather than treated as supplementary materials. Teacher training is also crucial to ensure effective dictionary instruction, particularly in guiding learners to interpret entries critically and apply lexical knowledge accurately. Finally, this review highlights directions for future research, including experimental and longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of dictionary-based instruction. Further investigation into *santri*-centered digital dictionaries is also needed to support self-regulated learning while avoiding superficial lookup practices.

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