

# Arab Academics' Perceptions of Fusha and Amiyah in Arabic Language Instruction in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Arabic language instruction in Indonesian higher education faces the diglossic challenge between Fusha (standard Arabic) and Amiyah (colloquial dialects). Instruction predominantly emphasizes Fusha, while Amiyah is rarely or never formally taught, resulting in students who are proficient in formal literacy but limited in practical communication. This study aims to explore academics' perceptions regarding the teaching of Fusha and Amiyah, understand students' challenges, and evaluate the curriculum strategies employed. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, involving in-depth interviews with 20 Arabic language academics from various State Islamic Universities (UINs) across Indonesia, analyzed using content analysis techniques. Findings indicate that Fusha serves as the primary foundation for academic literacy, whereas Amiyah is acquired informally through extracurricular experiences or exchange programs. Teaching strategies include lectures, text analysis, discussions, and Fusha-based writing exercises. These results provide an in-depth understanding of the prioritization of formal literacy and underscore the need to develop optional Amiyah modules to equip students with cross-cultural communication skills. The study recommends further exploration of integrating Amiyah into the formal curriculum.



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## A. Introduction

Arabic holds a significant role in Indonesia across academic, religious, and cross-cultural communication contexts (Hidayat & Anggraini, n.d.; I. Husna et al., 2024; Safitri & Farirahma, 2024). As the principal language of Islamic tradition, Arabic is taught at various educational levels, ranging from pesantren and madrasah to universities (L. Al Husna et al., 2023; Kurniasih et al., 2025). Arabic language instruction faces a diglossic challenge, characterized by the coexistence of two language varieties (Jama, 2022): Fusha (standard Arabic) and Amiyah (local or regional dialects). Fusha is predominantly employed in academic literature, official documents, and formal teaching materials (Ahmad Fadhel Syakir Hidayat et al., 2024; Bawardi, 2024; Daniëls, 2021), whereas Amiyah is more common in everyday interactions, social media, and informal communication (Abdullatif & ElhajKona, 2024). Consequently, mastery of Fusha remains a priority in formal education in Indonesia, while competence in Amiyah constitutes an added value for students in practical and cross-cultural communication contexts.

The urgency of this study arises from the observation that many Indonesian students struggle to acquire proficiency in both Fusha and Amiyah simultaneously (Anjani & Tatang, 2025). On one hand, Fusha proficiency is essential for understanding classical literature, academic texts, and the Qur'an (Hidayat et al., 2024). On the other hand, Amiyah competence enables students to communicate effectively with native speakers, particularly during studies in Arab countries (Bani, 2023). This gap highlights the critical need to understand academics' perceptions regarding the roles of both language varieties in language instruction.

Previous studies have highlighted challenges in Arabic language learning in Indonesia. Haris (2022) noted that students accustomed to Amiyah often encounter difficulties comprehending Fusha literary texts due to differences in vocabulary, structure, and stylistic conventions. This discrepancy affects learning motivation, academic understanding, and the ability to engage with classical literature. Other research indicates that integrating Amiyah into instruction can enhance student engagement and contextualize learning (Thomure et al., 2025). Therefore, developing balanced instructional strategies between Fusha and Amiyah is essential to improve students' literary comprehension while fostering practical communication skills.

Beyond linguistic challenges, academics' perceptions influence teaching strategies. Many Indonesian Arabic language instructors face a dilemma between emphasizing Fusha for academic purposes and incorporating Amiyah to support practical communication. Maash, (2025) observed that such imbalance can affect curriculum design, teaching methods, and instructional materials, making academic perceptions a key factor in successful language education.

The Indonesian context of Arabic language education is highly heterogeneous, spanning formal schools to pesantren. In some modern pesantren, instruction combines both varieties, although not consistently. Previous studies have primarily focused on student experiences or curriculum effectiveness, whereas systematic investigation of academics' perspectives on the relevance of Fusha and Amiyah remains scarce (Kirom et al., 2025). This literature gap forms the basis of the current study. Academics' perceptions of Fusha and Amiyah reflect the academic and social practices embedded in instruction. Understanding these perceptions is crucial to ensure that Arabic teaching in Indonesia addresses both literary proficiency and relevance to everyday communication (Rostandi et al.,

2025). Theoretically, this study is grounded in diglossia theory and sociolinguistic approaches, which emphasize the functional differentiation of language in social and academic contexts (Saiegh-Haddad & Armon-Lotem, 2024; Toomaneejinda & Saengboon, 2022). Academic perceptions serve as indicators of how curriculum, methods, and instructional materials can be adapted to effectively and contextually integrate both language varieties.

Technological advances and social media further complicate Arabic language learning in Indonesia (Idhan et al., 2026). Students are frequently exposed to Amiyah through digital media, music, and informal communication (Alharthy, 2025), while Fusha remains dominant in print media, academic documents, and formal examinations (Muttaqin et al., 2025). This situation necessitates that instructors balance teaching to ensure students acquire comprehensive competence in both varieties.

The central issues motivating this study are: first, the lack of balance between Fusha and Amiyah proficiency within Indonesian curricula and teaching practices; second, the limited understanding of academics' perceptions regarding the relevance of both varieties in Arabic language instruction. This study focuses on exploring academics' perceptions of the differences and relevance of Fusha and Amiyah, providing a foundation for developing pedagogical approaches tailored to the Indonesian context.

Accordingly, this study aims to offer theoretical contributions by providing an in-depth understanding of academics' perceptions regarding the use of Fusha and Amiyah in Arabic language education in Indonesia. Practically, it is expected to generate recommendations for curriculum designers, lecturers, and teachers to develop effective, relevant, and contextually appropriate instructional strategies for students. The findings are also anticipated to bridge the gap between diglossia theory and the practice of Arabic language teaching in Indonesia.

## B. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive phenomenological approach, as it aimed to explain and understand Arabic language academics' perceptions of the use of Fusha and Amiyah in language instruction. A descriptive phenomenological approach in qualitative research seeks to understand the essence of consciously experienced phenomena as perceived by individuals. This approach is rooted in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, which emphasizes "bracketing," or the suspension of assumptions, to capture lived experiences as they are, without the researcher's subjective interpretation (Abraham & P, 2025; Tavakol & Sandars, 2025; Watson, 2025).

The data sources in this study were Arabic language academics and lecturers at Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia who had experience teaching both Fusha and Amiyah. Purposive sampling was applied to select participants who met the following criteria: having at least three years of teaching experience, actively teaching both Arabic varieties, and being willing to participate in in-depth interviews. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection was discontinued when no new information emerged (Hennink, 2023; Naeem et al., 2024). Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, observation, and analysis of curriculum documents or teaching materials. Semi-structured interviews were used to enable the researcher to explore academics' perceptions in depth,

including their perceived challenges, teaching strategies, and pedagogical preferences (Eppich et al., 2019). Observation provided contextual data on the actual use of Fusha and Amiyah in instructional practice. Meanwhile, curriculum document analysis helped assess the alignment between academics' perceptions and the implementation of teaching materials.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify major themes and relationships across categories. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation involving interviews, observation, and documents, as well as member checking, in which participants verified the researcher's interpretation to ensure that the representation of data remained accurate and credible (Creswell, W. John & Creswell, 2018; Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014). This study was conducted at Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. Therefore, the research locus is considered representative of the broader context of Arabic language education in Indonesia. By employing a systematic method grounded in established principles of qualitative methodology, this study is expected to generate valid, credible, and reliable findings. It also provides an empirical basis for developing more contextual and effective curricula and instructional strategies for teaching Fusha and Amiyah.

### C. Findings and Discussion

#### Fusha

All interviewed academics emphasized that Fusha constitutes the primary foundation of Arabic language learning in Indonesian higher education. Academic 5 explained, "Mastery of Fusha is the main foundation of Arabic language education because all classical literature, books of Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'an, and academic documents use this variety." This statement indicates that Fusha is not merely a formal language variety, but also a strategic instrument for academic literacy, as the entire process of reading, writing, and analyzing academic texts depends on proficiency in this language. Therefore, students who lack adequate mastery of Fusha are likely to face significant difficulties in participating in formal learning and understanding classical literature authentically.

Academic 4 further stated that "students who focus on Fusha are able to understand the historical and academic contexts of Arabic texts more quickly." This statement highlights the role of Fusha as a bridge between formal literacy and historical contextual understanding. Mastery of this variety enables students not only to understand vocabulary and sentence structures, but also to grasp cultural nuances, legal terminology, and historical contexts embedded in classical Arabic literature. In other words, Fusha functions as an intellectual foundation that allows students to access primary sources in Arabic academic studies.

In teaching practice, Academic 1 explained, "A focus on Fusha enables students to acquire Arabic systematically and academically." This is reflected in the use of consistent instructional strategies, including interactive lectures, literary text analysis, oral and written discussions, and academic writing exercises. These strategies ensure that students acquire extensive formal vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and literary styles that constitute academic standards, while also developing critical and analytical thinking skills.

In addition to academic considerations, the teaching of Fusha is also prioritized because Amiyah is perceived as less relevant in formal classroom

contexts. Academic 8 stated, “Amiyah is regarded as a supplementary component that is not essential because it is not relevant to academic literacy objectives.” This view confirms that Indonesian higher education curricula emphasize formal literacy mastery. As a result, students who study only Fusha still possess a strong foundation for research and literature-based studies. However, their informal communicative competence in Amiyah remains limited, requiring additional experiences beyond the classroom to expand their practical language abilities.

Academic 7 offered a curricular perspective that emphasized the comprehensive integration of formal literacy: “A focus on Fusha makes it easier for students to develop literacy skills, understand academic texts, and write scholarly works.” The entire curriculum design, teaching materials, and assessment system are directed toward ensuring maximum mastery of Fusha. This enables students to meet formal literacy standards for further study, independent research, and academic career preparation.

Furthermore, these findings indicate that Fusha teaching strategies generate a dual impact: first, strengthening students’ formal literacy proficiency, and second, establishing an adequate academic foundation for research and classical text analysis. Students who are accustomed to Fusha are able to read legal documents, religious literature, and scholarly texts accurately, write formal papers using appropriate linguistic structures, and engage in discussions according to academic standards. Thus, Fusha serves as a bridge between linguistic competence and academic competence.

Overall, interviews with 20 academics revealed that Fusha is treated as an absolute priority in literature, academic documents, and teaching strategies. Teaching methods ranging from lectures, literary text analysis, and discussion to writing exercises are all oriented toward the mastery of Fusha. Amiyah is acquired by students only through informal experiences outside the classroom or through international exchange programs. Consequently, instruction remains systematic and focused on formal academic literacy. This confirms that Fusha literacy is not merely language mastery, but also a key form of capital for students’ academic success in Arabic language studies.

### **Teaching Amiyah**

In interviews with 20 academics, nearly all participants emphasized that Amiyah is rarely, or even never, taught in formal classroom settings. Academic 1 stated, “In my experience, Amiyah is rarely used in class because students’ learning context is still largely limited to formal literacy.” This statement indicates that Amiyah is perceived as less relevant to formal academic learning in Indonesian higher education, as students engage more frequently with literary texts and official documents than with everyday conversation.

Academic 2 added, “Amiyah is not taught because of the limited opportunities for oral practice in the classroom, and because the curriculum places greater emphasis on reading, writing, and understanding formal texts than on everyday conversational speaking.” This finding suggests that the main instructional priority is formal academic literacy, while mastery of informal language varieties such as Amiyah becomes the students’ responsibility outside the classroom. Therefore, students who wish to learn Amiyah must independently seek additional learning resources.

Several academics emphasized that Amiyah remains important for practical communication skills, although it is not officially taught. Academic 3 stated,

“Amiyah is not included in the official curriculum because most students learn in non-Arabic environments and rarely encounter informal conversational situations.” This indicates that communicative competence in Amiyah can only be acquired through direct experience, such as participation in international exchange programs or interaction with native speakers outside the classroom.

Based on the experiences of Academics 4 and 5, students who wish to master Amiyah usually participate voluntarily in activities beyond formal instruction, including informal study groups, digital media use, or travel to Arab countries. Academic 5 emphasized, “Informal conversational practice is usually undertaken voluntarily only by students who have a particular interest in, or experience of, Arab countries.” Thus, mastery of Amiyah depends largely on individual motivation and opportunities for interaction, rather than on the formal curriculum.

In addition, several academics highlighted that the limited teaching of Amiyah affects students’ readiness for real-life communication. Students may understand academic literature and classical texts well, yet their ability to speak spontaneously and comprehend everyday conversations remains weak. This condition reveals a gap between formal literacy and practical communicative competence, which is a critical issue for developing a more holistic Arabic language curriculum.

The formal curriculum focuses on Fusha for academic literacy, while Amiyah is learned only informally or through experiences outside the classroom. As a result, students’ ability to understand and speak Amiyah remains limited. Overall, the teaching of Amiyah in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia is supplementary and unstructured.

This condition confirms that formal literacy through Fusha remains the primary objective, while Amiyah functions only as an added value for students who have sufficient motivation and learning opportunities beyond the classroom. These findings provide a basis for developing more balanced curriculum strategies, so that students are not only proficient in formal literacy but also possess practical communication skills relevant to Arab social and cultural contexts.

The main challenge faced by students in Arabic language learning at Indonesian higher education institutions is the limited opportunity to practice speaking in Amiyah, despite their strong mastery of Fusha. Academic 1 stated, “Students have only minimal contact with the everyday conversations of native speakers, so the teaching of Amiyah is considered less relevant.” This statement indicates that although students are able to read and write formal texts, their practical communication skills remain limited, particularly in spontaneous interaction with native speakers.

Academic 2 emphasized, “Students focus more on Fusha because the curriculum emphasizes formal literacy, reading, writing, and understanding academic texts, rather than everyday conversational speaking.” This confirms that the primary objective of Fusha instruction is formal literacy, while the ability to speak Amiyah becomes the responsibility of students outside the classroom. Consequently, students who wish to master Amiyah must actively seek additional exposure through digital media, learning communities, or international exchange programs.

In Academic 3’s experience, students encounter difficulties when they must interact directly with native speakers. The academic explained, “Most students learn in non-Arabic environments and rarely encounter informal conversational situations. Therefore, their ability to speak Amiyah is very limited.” This finding

was consistent across the interviewed academics, indicating a common pattern of limited oral practice outside formal academic contexts.

This condition highlights the gap between the formal literacy students acquire and the practical communication skills required in real-life contexts. Several academics emphasized that this challenge arises because the curriculum does not provide formal sessions for Amiyah. Academic 4 stated, "All Arabic language instruction in the classroom is focused on Fusha, from reading classical texts to writing academic papers." This shows that although formal literacy is ensured, students lack opportunities to practice Arabic in social and interactive contexts.

Furthermore, Academic 5 added, "The main difficulty arises when students have to engage in everyday conversations with native speakers because Amiyah is not taught in class." This statement emphasizes that students need personal initiative to acquire informal communication skills, either through additional courses, extracurricular activities, or direct experience in Arab countries. This challenge provides a foundation for developing a more holistic curriculum, so that students are not only competent in formal literacy but also equipped with relevant practical communication skills.

Overall, the interviews show that students' challenges in mastering Amiyah are shaped by curriculum structure and the learning environment. Students have strong formal literacy skills through Fusha, yet their everyday communicative competence remains limited. These findings underline the need for additional learning strategies that can bridge formal literacy and practical communication skills, such as optional Amiyah modules or interactive activities outside the classroom.

All interviewed academics confirmed that classroom time is fully allocated to Fusha, while Amiyah does not receive formal sessions in the curriculum. Academic 1 emphasized, "In my experience, all academic literature, books of Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'an, and formal documents use Fusha, so all instructional hours are focused on mastering Fusha." This statement indicates that the curriculum places formal literacy as the main priority in Arabic language learning. This focus ensures that students develop the ability to read, write, and analyze classical texts according to appropriate academic standards.

Academic 2 explained that teaching strategies are also entirely based on Fusha. The academic stated, "Students mostly read, write, and analyze formal texts. Amiyah is rarely used because the curriculum emphasizes academic literacy rather than informal conversation." This confirms that mastery of Amiyah is not part of the formal curriculum objectives, meaning that students primarily master standard Arabic for literature and academic assessment. A Fusha-focused curriculum helps students concentrate on academic literacy and minimizes distraction from informal conversational learning.

In addition, Academic 3 highlighted the teaching methods used to strengthen formal literacy. The academic explained, "Teaching strategies include interactive lectures, document analysis, oral and written discussions, and Fusha-based academic writing exercises." In other words, every strategy employed is directed toward building students' formal literacy, including their ability to read classical texts, write scholarly works, and understand academic literature.

These strategies also strengthen students' critical and analytical thinking skills, as they are encouraged to interpret textual meanings deeply and construct logical arguments in academic writing. Several academics added that there is no

official balance between Fusha theory and Amiyah practice. Academic 4 stated, "Amiyah is not formally taught, so students who wish to learn Amiyah usually do so voluntarily outside the classroom." This indicates that Amiyah learning depends on students' individual motivation, personal experience, or opportunities to participate in international exchange programs.

Students who actively take initiative may acquire practical conversational skills, but such learning remains supplementary and is not guaranteed by the curriculum. Finally, Academic 5 emphasized that the curriculum's focus on Fusha has a positive impact on students' academic readiness. The academic stated, "All assessments, assignments, and examinations are based on Fusha, so students become accustomed to reading, writing, and discussing in standard Arabic, which is a requirement for academic success."

Thus, teaching strategies and curriculum design ensure that students develop strong formal literacy competence, are able to meet international academic standards, and possess an adequate foundation for Arabic language research. Nevertheless, informal communicative competence in Amiyah remains limited. Therefore, the current curriculum has not yet provided a balance between formal literacy and practical communication skills.

Overall, the interviews show that Arabic language curricula in Indonesian higher education prioritize Fusha in teaching materials, instructional strategies, and assessment. Amiyah is learned only through informal experiences outside the classroom. As a result, students possess strong formal literacy, but their everyday communication skills remain limited. These findings underscore the importance of developing a more holistic curriculum strategy that integrates formal literacy with practical communication practice to support students' comprehensive Arabic language competence.

## **Discussion**

The findings show that Fusha serves as the primary foundation of Arabic language instruction in Indonesian higher education. All academics agreed that classical literature, books of Islamic jurisprudence, the Qur'an, and academic documents are written in Fusha. Therefore, mastery of this variety is considered indispensable. This finding is consistent with diglossia theory, which emphasizes the functional distinction between Fusha and Amiyah. Fusha is used in formal, literary, and academic contexts, whereas Amiyah functions in everyday communication (AlAfnan, 2021; Salah, 2014). Strong mastery of Fusha enables students to read classical texts authentically and write scholarly works according to academic standards.

The consistent teaching of Fusha across Islamic higher education institutions enables students to develop systematic formal literacy. Academics emphasized instructional strategies such as lectures, literary text analysis, discussion, and academic writing exercises. These strategies not only develop students' mastery of formal vocabulary and sentence structures, but also train their critical analytical skills in interpreting classical Arabic texts (Mottaqi & Esmaili, 2025). This indicates that formal literacy is the main objective of the curriculum, supporting students' academic readiness and Arabic language research competence (Laajan et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, Amiyah is rarely or never taught in formal classrooms, as academic instruction places greater emphasis on formal literacy and text analysis. The academics stated that Amiyah mastery is acquired only informally through

digital media, personal experience, or international exchange programs. In line with Alaoui, (2025), Habash et al. (2014), Omar & Aldawsari (2022), this condition indicates an imbalance between formal literacy and practical communicative competence. Students who rely solely on Fusha are not adequately prepared for everyday conversations with native speakers. As a result, their practical communication skills remain limited.

The main challenge emerges when students encounter real-life communicative situations. The interviews revealed that limited oral practice makes it difficult for students to speak spontaneously in Amiyah, despite having good Fusha literacy. This finding is also consistent with Retnawati et al. (2020), Shendy, (2019). It confirms that a formal curriculum focused on Fusha is effective for literacy development, yet insufficient for equipping students with practical cross-cultural communication skills. This factor appeared consistently across the interviewed academics, indicating a common pattern in Indonesian higher education institutions.

Curricula and teaching strategies that are fully oriented toward Fusha support formal academic literacy, but they do not provide practical exposure to Amiyah. Teaching strategies, including interactive lectures, document analysis, and Fusha-based discussion, are effective in developing formal literacy competence. However, they remain insufficient for informal communication. The academics emphasized that students who wish to learn Amiyah must take their own initiative outside the classroom, such as through direct experience in Arab countries or digital media exposure.

These findings are consistent with Fauzi & Madjid, (2025), Urwati et al. (2026), who found that formal Arabic instruction emphasizes Fusha, while Amiyah is learned informally. However, in the Indonesian context, exposure to Amiyah is much more limited than in Arab-speaking environments. Consequently, students are relatively less prepared to engage in everyday conversations. This highlights the need to introduce optional Amiyah learning strategies, such as supplementary courses or extracurricular activities, to complement formal literacy development.

The practical implication of this study is that Fusha instruction is adequate for academic literacy. However, students require additional experiences beyond the classroom to develop practical communication skills. Instructional strategies that combine formal literacy with exposure to Amiyah may improve students' readiness for cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, these findings suggest that the curriculum needs to adjust the balance between formal linguistic theory and communicative practice to address students' learning needs more comprehensively.

This study has several limitations. Its primary focus was on academics' perceptions, while students' direct experiences were not analyzed in depth. In addition, this study did not quantitatively measure students' practical competence in Amiyah. Future research may expand the participant sample, involve students, and evaluate the effectiveness of integrating Amiyah modules into the curriculum. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the balance between formal literacy and practical communicative competence.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that Arabic language instruction in Indonesian higher education places Fusha as the primary focus, while Amiyah is rarely, or even never,

taught in formal classroom settings. Students generally develop strong formal literacy, including the ability to read classical texts and produce academic writing, yet their practical communicative competence in Amiyah remains limited. These findings provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of diglossia in Arabic language education in Indonesia. They confirm the prioritization of formal literacy and are consistent with diglossia theory and previous studies. Academically, the findings emphasize the importance of Fusha for formal literacy development and textual analysis. Practically, they indicate the need for additional strategies for students who wish to develop informal communication skills, either through optional courses or direct interaction with native speakers. The limitations of this study include its focus on academics' perceptions without directly involving students and without quantitatively measuring students' competence in Amiyah. Future research may explore the implementation of Amiyah modules, the integration of informal communication practices, and their effects on students' cross-cultural communicative competence. Such efforts may contribute to a more balanced model of Arabic language instruction that integrates formal literacy with practical communication skills.

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