Contemporary Issues in Balaghah Instruction at Malaysian Public Universities for the Period 2020-2025

Normila Noruddin[1*], Najihah Abdul Wahid[2], Abdul Wahid Salleh[3]

Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 21300 Kuala Terengganu.

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Balaghah instruction at Malaysian public universities has increasingly encountered challenges in maintaining its relevance within contemporary higher education contexts. Many students demonstrate limited ability to conceptualise and apply Balaghah beyond its traditional theoretical framework, resulting in surface-level understanding and reduced academic engagement. Although prior studies on Balaghah pedagogy are extensive, much of the existing literature concentrates on instructional techniques in isolation, offering limited examination of the deeper structural and epistemological foundations that shape the discipline. This gap necessitates a more critical and conceptually grounded investigation. Accordingly, this study employs a critical literature review and conceptual analysis to examine the underlying issues affecting Balaghah instruction at IPTA during the period 2020–2025. The analysis identifies three dominant themes: First, a static curriculum insufficiently aligned with contemporary digital and linguistic environments; secondly, pedagogical practices that remain predominantly centred on classical texts, with limited emphasis on interaction and contextual application; and thirdly, levels of lecturer preparedness that have yet to fully correspond with the demands of digital and multimodal literacy. The findings indicate a clear need for a comprehensive reconfiguration of both curriculum design and pedagogical approaches in Balaghah instruction. Such reform is essential to ensure that Balaghah continues to function as a relevant and analytically meaningful discipline within modern higher education.

Keywords: Balaghah; Higher Education; Arabic Language Curriculum; Critical Pedagogy; Digital Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Balaghah constitutes a significant intellectual heritage of the Arabic language, playing a vital role in shaping linguistic eloquence and sharpening intellectual acuity, particularly in the appreciation of the stylistic features of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, within the contemporary higher education context, the teaching of Balaghah is frequently perceived as ineffective and insufficiently engaging for students (Mahmudah et al., 2025). A considerable number of students regard this discipline as difficult, rigid, and detached from current realities shaped by visual communication and digital interaction (Fathanah & Bana, 2025). This phenomenon raises fundamental questions regarding the effectiveness of prevailing approaches to Balaghah instruction in higher education institutions.

Existing discussions often revolve around issues such as lecturers' competencies, curriculum misalignment, or shifts in student attitudes, without offering a comprehensive explanation of the problem. Although the importance of Balaghah, particularly in uncovering the linguistic uniqueness of the Qur'an continues to be emphasised, students' levels of mastery and interest in this field have been reported to be in decline (Aida et al., 2025). Most previous studies have focused on proposing more creative teaching methods or advocating the use of technology, yet they have paid limited attention to core issues related to curriculum structure, epistemological

foundations, and the underlying paradigms that shape the teaching of Balaghah. This analytical gap necessitates a more in-depth and systematic examination to better understand and reinforce the relevance of Balaghah in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Balaghah instruction, particularly at the tertiary level, reveals considerable divergence in scholarly perspectives. Some researchers advocate comprehensive curriculum reform, arguing that existing content places excessive emphasis on theoretical and historical aspects while failing to connect Balaghah with contemporary textual analysis (al-Kilani, 2019). Such an approach is believed to produce students who memorise definitions without grasping the functional significance and deeper meaning of Balaghah. In contrast, more conservative scholars emphasise the importance of preserving the traditional curriculum structure in order to maintain continuity within the classical scholarly tradition of Balaghah (Al-Harithy, 2021). This tension often diverts attention away from more fundamental pedagogical concerns.

From a pedagogical standpoint, many studies recommend the use of technology such as interactive applications and e-learning platforms as a means of enhancing student engagement (Abdullah & Zainuddin, 2020). However, the mere incorporation of technology does not necessarily result in meaningful change if teaching approaches remain unidirectional and centred on rote memorisation. Issues related to lecturers' professional training and institutional support for pedagogical innovation also receive limited attention, despite being identified as major challenges (Rahman et al., 2022).

Furthermore, there is a tendency to attribute students' weak mastery of Balaghah solely to motivational factors (Hasan, 2023). Such an interpretation is overly simplistic, as it overlooks the possibility that instructional approaches may fail to connect learning content with students' contemporary life contexts. Criticism has also been directed at the excessive emphasis on grammar (nahw) and morphology (ṣarf) without clear integration with Balaghah (Ismail, 2019). The complementary relationship among these disciplines is rarely analysed holistically; instead, they are often treated as separate and disconnected fields.

Overall, this review of the literature indicates that existing discussions remain fragmented and insufficiently address Balaghah instruction as a complex and interconnected system. The lack of integrative approaches and critical conceptual frameworks highlights an urgent need to develop a new perspective that is more holistic and responsive to contemporary educational demands.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conceptual analysis approach, a research method that does not involve the collection of empirical field data. In fact, this approach requires a high level of intellectual rigour, as its primary focus extends beyond merely compiling and organising existing information to critically examining, deconstructing, and reconstructing conceptual understandings of a given issue (Grigoryeva et al., 2021). In the context of this study, conceptual analysis is employed to reassess the discourse on Balaghah instruction and to formulate a new narrative that is more aligned with contemporary challenges.

The main objective of this methodology is to develop a new conceptual framework, or at least to refine existing frameworks that are no longer congruent with the realities of Balaghah instruction in Malaysian public higher education institutions. This approach is deemed appropriate because the issues surrounding Balaghah instruction are not merely technical in nature; rather, they stem from the epistemological foundations of the discipline, including how Balaghah is understood, interpreted, and positioned within the contemporary higher education system. Consequently, this study places strong emphasis on these foundational aspects that underpin instructional practices.

The research process begins with a focused selection of documents. A literature search was conducted on journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and theses related to Balaghah instruction, Arabic language

pedagogy, and Islamic education. Documents were purposively selected based on the following criteria: first, they contain critical analysis or clearly articulated theoretical frameworks; second, they address issues related to curriculum, pedagogy, or the epistemology of Balaghah; and third, they demonstrate potential to contribute to conceptual debates. Purely descriptive works, studies that merely reiterate established narratives, and publications offering recommendations without in-depth analysis were excluded. Primary attention was given to studies published between 2020 and 2025, although classical works were also consulted to establish a robust historical and theoretical foundation.

Subsequently, the analytical procedure involved repeated and systematic readings of the selected documents. This process entailed identifying key themes, argumentative tensions, gaps in discussion, and conceptual weaknesses. During this phase, conceptual coding was employed to mark ideas related to curriculum, pedagogy, epistemology, and technology integration. The purpose of coding was not to quantify frequency, but rather to trace dominant modes of thinking and to identify perspectives that diverge from mainstream discourse yet possess the potential to open new avenues of understanding.

Finally, the findings were synthesised through a process of interpretation and integration. Rather than reporting arguments from previous studies in isolation, these arguments were compared, interconnected, and critically evaluated to construct new lines of reasoning. Through this approach, issues in Balaghah instruction are understood as an interconnected system forming a complex ecosystem of challenges. This synthesis aims to build intellectual linkages between existing knowledge and emerging educational needs, thereby contributing to more meaningful and theoretically grounded reforms in Balaghah instruction.

FINDINGS

The challenges associated with Balaghah instruction in Malaysian public higher education institutions do not stem from a single factor; rather, they emerge from a network of interrelated issues. One of the principal findings is the static nature of the Balaghah curriculum, which remains heavily oriented towards classical frameworks (Fahmi et al., 2025). The curriculum places strong emphasis on definitions and rhetorical classifications without establishing clear connections to contemporary communicative realities. As a result, students struggle to perceive the relevance of Balaghah theory within modern communication landscapes shaped by digital media and diverse semiotic systems.

Moreover, Balaghah is frequently taught as an isolated discipline, disconnected from current social and cultural discourses (Fahmi et al., 2025). From a pedagogical perspective, teaching practices continue to be dominated by one-way lectures, text memorisation, and rhetorical analysis based on classical examples. Opportunities for twoway interaction and learning activities grounded in critical exploration remain limited. Consequently, the instructional process functions primarily as information transmission rather than as a space for intellectual discourse construction, leading students to adopt passive learning roles and limiting their ability to apply knowledge in new contexts (Fathanah & Bana, 2025).

The findings also reveal significant shortcomings in technology integration. Despite the centrality of visual, audio, and digital communication in contemporary linguistic experiences, Balaghah is rarely utilised as an analytical tool for multimedia texts, social media content, or digital discourse (Aida et al., 2025). The absence of technological applications such as text analysis software, digital tools, or new media platforms, restricts the scope of Balaghah's application and reinforces the perception of the discipline as overly theoretical and detached from real-world contexts.

Lecturers' preparedness was also identified as a significant factor. While many lecturers possess strong traditional expertise in Balaghah, their exposure to modern pedagogical approaches and digital literacy appears limited. This situation reflects deficiencies in institutional support and continuous professional development rather than individual shortcomings. In this context, students' motivation should be viewed as an outcome of less relevant instructional approaches rather than as the root cause of the problem. When learning experiences fail to demonstrate practical value and meaningful application, students' interest in Balaghah inevitably declines.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the challenges of Balaghah instruction in Malaysian public higher education institutions stem from systemic issues that extend beyond curriculum design and pedagogical practices alone. The inability to align Balaghah with the realities of 21st-century communication reflects a widening gap between established scholarly traditions and contemporary educational needs. A static curriculum not only signals delays in content revision but also suggests a reluctance to reinterpret Balaghah as a cross-contextual tool for discourse analysis.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, Balaghah instruction should empower students to analyse power relations, ideology, and linguistic manipulation across diverse forms of discourse, including mass media and digital communication. However, prevailing approaches that prioritise mastery of classical terminology and structural frameworks fail to support this objective. As a result, graduates may demonstrate linguistic competence yet remain insufficiently sensitive to the rhetorical dimensions of public and media communication.

Viewed through a constructivist lens, meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through interaction with learning materials. The findings reveal that Balaghah instruction remains largely transmission-oriented, with lecturers positioned as the primary source of knowledge and students as passive recipients. Such an approach is inconsistent with constructivist principles and constrains the development of deep understanding and critical thinking.

Furthermore, the failure to integrate multimodal literacy and digital semiotics undermines the potential of Balaghah as a relevant analytical discipline. In contemporary communicative environments characterised by visual, audio, and symbolic texts, Balaghah holds considerable promise as a foundation for media literacy and semiotic awareness. Nevertheless, this potential remains underutilised due to pedagogical and technological constraints, thereby confining the application of Balaghah largely to traditional printed texts.

Issues related to lecturers' readiness and institutional support should be understood as components of a broader educational ecosystem. Without continuous professional development, adequate resources, and institutional encouragement for pedagogical innovation, efforts to transform Balaghah instruction are unlikely to succeed. In this context, student motivation should not be viewed as the root cause of the problem, but rather as an indicator of the effectiveness of the instructional system currently in place.

Overall, the findings and discussion underscore the need to redefine Balaghah as a discipline that functions to cultivate critical thinking, discourse literacy, and rhetorical sensitivity across multiple media. A more integrative approach grounded in contemporary educational theory and supported by technology is essential to ensure that Balaghah remains relevant, dynamic, and meaningful within the context of modern higher education.

Based on the discussion of the findings, the issues surrounding Balaghah instruction in IPTA can be understood as ecosystemic in nature, encompassing the elements illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Contemporary Issues in Balaghah Instruction

Issues
• Static and inflexible curriculum, disconnected from contemporary discourse realities
• Transmission-oriented pedagogical practices
• Failure to integrate multimodal and digital literacy
• Constraints related to lecturers' readiness and institutional support
Proposed Integrative Balaghah Instruction
• Reinterpretation of classical Balaghah
• Contemporary discourse analysis

•   Active and reflective learning
•   Integration of educational technology
Learning Outcomes of Balaghah
•   Critical thinking
•   Discourse and media literacy
•   Rhetorical sensitivity
•   Social and academic relevance

CONCLUSION

The discussion of issues surrounding Balaghah instruction in Malaysian public higher education institutions from 2020 to 2025 demonstrates that the challenges encountered are foundational and systemic in nature, rather than surface-level problems that can be addressed through short-term solutions. Inflexible curricula, limited interactive pedagogical approaches, and the failure to integrate digital technologies have collectively shaped an instructional ecosystem that constrains the relevance and appeal of Balaghah among contemporary students. This situation is further compounded by lecturers' levels of preparedness, which have yet to fully align with the demands of contemporary pedagogy, thereby creating a significant gap between the content delivered and students' actual needs to function critically within modern communication landscapes.
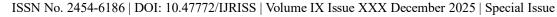
In light of these findings, future research should move beyond a sole focus on problem identification towards the development of applicative and project-based Balaghah curriculum models. Approaches that warrant further exploration include rhetorical analysis of social media discourse, the construction of digital persuasive texts, and creative writing workshops that apply Balaghah principles within contemporary literary contexts. Such approaches hold the potential to bridge Balaghah theory with authentic communicative practices and to enhance the meaningfulness of learning experiences.

In addition, empirical research should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of lecturer retraining programmes that emphasise digital pedagogy and multimodal text analysis. Field-based studies are also needed to assess the impact of simulation-based pedagogical workshops on students' understanding and mastery of Balaghah. Data-driven evaluation is essential to ensure that any proposed reforms are supported by robust empirical evidence.

Overall, a more systematic and evidence-based research trajectory is crucial to ensure that Balaghah instruction can be transformed effectively and sustainably. Without deliberate and structured reform efforts, the discipline risks continued marginalisation within higher education. Conversely, through more strategic and empirically grounded approaches, Balaghah holds strong potential to be re-established as a relevant field of knowledge capable of fostering discourse analysis skills and critical thinking in contemporary society.

REFERENCES

1. Abdullah, M. S., & Zainuddin, S. (2020). Penggunaan media sosial dalam pengajaran balaghah:
2. Aida, I. N., Maulana, A., & Rosid, A. (2025). Integrating Qur'anic verses in teaching Arabic rhetoric (balaghah): A classroom action research approach. Abjadia, 10(2), 250–360. https://doi.org/10.18860/abj.v10i2.32788
3. Analisis potensi dan cabaran di IPTA Malaysia. Jurnal Bahasa Arab, 7(1), 45-60.
4. Al-Harithy, K. (2021). Preserving the classical framework: A critical defense of traditional Balaghah curriculum in Arab universities. Journal of Arabic Language Studies, 12(3), 201-218.
5. Al-Kilani, A. (2019). Towards a modern Balaghah curriculum: Bridging the gap between classical theory and contemporary application. International Journal of Arabic Linguistics, 5(2), 89-104.
6. Fahmi, M. Z., Ihsan, M., Handayani, R., Simbolon, P., Rahayu, F., Hanafi, M., & Ariza, F. N. (2025). Memahami pesan al-qur'an lebih dalam: aplikasi retorika balaghah untuk peningkatan literasi keagamaan masyarakat sebuah pendekatan konseptual. Development, 4(1), 228–239. https://doi.org/10.46773/djce.v4i1.2109

7. Fathanah, F., & Bana, R. A. F. (2025). Kesulitan belajar balaghah menggunakan kitab ma'ani kelas xi sma it miftahul ali lendang pengkores. Secondary, 5(3), 463–471. https://doi.org/10.51878/secondary.v5i3.6801

8. Grigoryeva, I. V., Tumanova, A. B., & Zharylgapov, Zh. Zh. (2021). Conceptual analysis: principles and approaches in teaching. Ķaraġandy Universitetiniŋ Habaršysy. Filologiâ Seriâsy. https://doi.org/10.31489/2021ph4/133-138

9. Hasan, F. (2023). Perceptions of Arabic language students on Balaghah instruction and its relevance in the digital age. Malaysian Journal of Language and Communication, 10(1), 123-140.

10. Ismail, R. (2019). Integrasi ilmu Nahu dan Balaghah dalam pengajaran bahasa Arab: Satu tinjauan kritis. Jurnal Pengajian Bahasa Arab, 2(1), 30-45.

11. Mahmudah, M., Maghfiroh, L., Hanifansyah, N., & Syakur, S. A. (2025). Enhancing Arabic Rhetoric Education through Mind Mapping: A Focus on Bayan & Badi'. Lughawiyyat, 8(1), 32–55. https://doi.org/10.38073/lughawiyyat.v8i1.2208

12. Mohamad, S. (2022). Pedagogi interaktif dalam pengajaran Balaghah: Analisis keberkesanan penggunaan aplikasi multimedia. Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, 8(2), 77-92.

13. Mustafa, Z. (2021). Transformasi digital dalam pendidikan bahasa Arab: Cabaran dan peluang untuk Balaghah. Proceeding of the International Conference on Arabic Language and Literature, 4, 115-128.

14. Omar, H. (2020). Relevansi Balaghah dalam analisis wacana kontemporari: Perspektif pelajar bahasa Arab. Jurnal Komunikasi Kontemporari, 9(1), 60-75.

15. Rahman, A., Ali, S., & Daud, M. (2022). Teacher preparedness for digital pedagogy in Arabic language education: A case study of Malaysian universities. Asian Journal of University Education, 18(4), 189-204.

16. Sidek, M. (2020). Dilema kurikulum Balaghah di IPTA: Antara tradisi dan modenisasi. Jurnal Pengajian Islam Kontemporari, 11(3), 1-15.

17. Wahid, N. (2023). Balaghah dan literasi media: Menganalisis potensi ilmu retorik dalam memahami kandungan digital. Prosiding Kolokium Linguistik dan Bahasa Arab, 6, 45-58.

18. Yusof, S. (2019). Cabaran pensyarah Balaghah dalam menghadapi generasi Z: Isu pedagogi dan penerimaan pelajar. Jurnal Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran, 15(2), 20-35.