

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERIODIZATION OF KUFah NAHWU SCHOLARS: A STUDY OF ARABIC LITERATURE

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This study aims to reveal the uniqueness and character of the periodization of the nahwu Kufah expert figures. The data obtained were collected using reading and note-taking techniques, then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The results of this study indicate that the Kufah school is a school that was born two years after the founding of the nahwu school in the city of Basra in 16-17 H, and the nahwu period of the Kufah school is divided into five generations, while the first generation figures are al-Ru'asi and al-Harra' which is characterized by the results of thinking that still follow the nahwu flow of Basra, the second generation figure is al-Kisa'i who uses tactics in expressing the mindset of Basra, third generation figures al-Ahmar, al-Farra', al-Dharir, al-Lihyani which is characterized by the separation of grammatical knowledge of nahwu and sharf sciences as well as the occurrence of debates between the two schools of Kufah and Basra which is characterized by a lack of development of nahwu science because it is still considered in the previous generation, the fourth generation figure is Ibnu Sa'dan, al-Thuwal, Ibn Qadim, and the fifth generation figure is Tsa'lab which is characterized by the emergence of various linguistic scholarships apart from nahwu and sharf such as balagh.

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INTRODUCTION

Kufah and Basrah are two schools of thought in the substance of nahwu scholarship. These two schools are inseparable from the early formation of nahwu (Arabic grammar) as a science. The Basrah school laid the foundation for nahwu studies, while the Kufah school served as a reinforcing link, giving distinct characteristics while still being based on the Basrah school. The terminology of Kufah nahwu continues to develop to this day (Husnaya & Budi, 2025). Although its popularity is not as widespread as that of the previous school, it offers a distinctive sense of renewal to nahwu terminology. Kufah is well-known for its transmission-based approach with a descriptive tendency (Fachruddin, 2021; Ghersetti, 2020). The reason behind Kufah's tendency toward transmission has its own background many of the Prophet's companions once settled in the region of Kufah, and many of them were experts in qirā'āt (Al Farabi, 2020; Hasibuan et al., 2023). Scholars of Kufah believed that the foundation of nahwu science should be based on the language of the native speakers of the region, in contrast to Basrah, which leaned more toward ta'lil and philosophical approaches. The Kufah scholars accepted all expressions originating from Arab speakers regardless of their linguistic purity or eloquence. This was intended as a form of respect toward the speakers of the language, even though such acceptance was not applied universally (Al-Ajrami, 2024; Harianto et al., 2025).

One of the key figures was al-Kisā'ī, whose work was later developed by his student, Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrā'. The Kufah school also did not strictly adhere to qiyās based on the principles of mantiq, as was the case in the Basrah school. Their linguistic rules were often analogized (qiyās) by some Kufah scholars by referring to Basrah scholars (Asrina, 2016; Kamal, 2022; Taufik, 2020). Al-Farrā' was the only Kufah scholar well-known for the maturity of his logic. In addition, he was also known as a mutakallim (theologian) who adhered to the Mu'tazilah school of thought (Fachruddin, 2021). The formulation of nahwu theory in the Kufah school was based on two main sources: first, the acceptable language used as a reference for theory could come from Arabs living in either rural or urban areas; second, both prose and poetry used for analogy could originate from city dwellers or villagers, from individuals or communities (Tsani et al., 2024). While the Basrah scholars experienced a decline in linguistic and nahwu studies, Kufah instead witnessed a period of growth in religious scholarship, the transmission of poetry, and literature.

The Kufah school was broader and more open in accepting language from any group, without restricting the origin of the linguistic sources. Based on these conditions and phenomena, Shawqī Ḍhayf divided Kufah nahwu into five periods, each with its own characteristics, to bridge and continue the scholarly legacy of Basrah's nahwu school, and to facilitate classification based on the birth years of each scholar (Aryobimo et al., 2023). There are studies relevant to the present research, including one by Ridwan entitled "Karakteristik Nuhah Kufah dan Bashrah", which discusses the characteristics of nahwu developed by the scholars of Kufah, stating that the rules they established were not fundamentally different from those developed by Basrah scholars (Ridwan, 2011). Another relevant study is by Taufik, entitled "Mazhab-Mazhab Ilmu Nahwu dalam Sastra Arab Klasik", which explores the emergence and development of nahwu within the tradition of classical Islamic scholarship, including its major scholars, their methods, and

the characteristics of their thought (Taufik, 2020). Furthermore, there is a study by Fahmi Yahya et al., (2021) entitled "Dissimilarities Between the Nahwu Science of the Basrah and Kufah Sects Along With Their Implications For Translating Al-Qur'an", which discusses how the translation of the Qur'an is not based on a single nahwu school, but rather integrates elements from both major nahwu schools: Basrah and Kufah (Haq et al., 2021). Based on the phenomena and the relevant studies, this article will discuss the development of Kufah nahwu through five generations, as formulated by prominent scholars of the Kufah school.

Several relevant studies have discussed the dynamics of Arabic grammatical schools, particularly the distinction between the Basrah and Kufah traditions (Haq et al., 2021; Ridwan, 2011; Taufik, 2020). These works generally examine the emergence of nahwu as a discipline, the methodological and epistemological contrasts between the two schools, and their implications for Arabic language studies and Qur'anic translation. However, most of these studies tend to focus on comparative aspects or emphasize the foundational role of the Basrah school, often overlooking the internal scholarly evolution of the Kufah school itself. This article addresses that gap by offering a systematic analysis of the Kufah school's development across five successive generations of scholars. Drawing on Shawqī Ḍhayf's framework of periodization, this study not only contextualizes the historical trajectory of the Kufah tradition but also demonstrates its independent contributions to the formulation of nahwu thought and its enduring legacy in Arabic linguistic heritage.

METHOD

The method used in this research is the library research method, which involves examining, analyzing, and collecting various literatures relevant to the topic discussed in this study. This research draws upon a range of reading sources, both primary and secondary, that support the discussion of the various schools of Arabic grammar. The main data source for this study is the book *al-Madāris al-Naḥwiyyah* by Shawqī Ḍhayyif, which comprehensively explores the development of nahwu mazhabs across generations. The data was collected through a reading and note-taking technique carefully reading the content of the book and then noting down relevant information for further analysis. The analysis was carried out using a descriptive qualitative approach, by explaining and elaborating on the thoughts of nahwu scholars in each period or generation, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and contributions of each madrasah nahwu.

RESULTS

According to Shawqī Ḍhayyif, in his book *al-Madāris al-Naḥwiyyah*, Kufah is divided into five generations. The key figures of the first generation are al-Ru'āsī and Mu'ādh al-Ḥarrā'. The second generation is represented by al-Kisā'ī. The third generation includes al-Aḥmar, al-Farrā', Hishām al-Ḍarīr, and al-Liḥyānī. The fourth generation consists of Ibn Sa'dān, al-Ṭuwāl, and Ibn Qadīm. The prominent figure of the fifth generation is Tha'lab (Ḍaif, 1986). This classification is summarized in the following table:

Periodization	Scholar's Name	Characteristics
First	-	There was no specific foundation for the study of nahwu itself, as it was still based on Basrah nahwu. Interpretation of the classification of ism (nouns) and ḥarf (particles).
Second	Al-Kisa'i (died 189 AH)	There was a strategy used to develop the science of nahwu, which involved discussions among scholars from Basrah as well as secretly reading the book written by Sibawayh.
Third	Al-Ahmar (died. 194 AH) Al-Farra' (died. 207 AH) Hisyam ad-Darir (died. 209 AH) Al-Lihyani (died. 220 AH)	There was an increasing production of writings in religious sciences, language sciences and ṣarf (morphology) The focus on nahwu and ṣarf began to be separated. There was special attention and efforts to correct common oral mistake The spread of debates between Basrah and Kufah led to the emergence of the term "kufah Nahwu"
Fourth	Ibn Sa'dan (died. 231 AH) At-Tuwwal (died. 243 AH) Ibn Qadim (died. 251 AH)	The composition of written works began to decline. New opinions in the fields of nahwu and ṣarf did not emerge, as scholars tended to adhere to the views of earlier Kufah nahwu experts.
Fifth	-	A variety of knowledge fields began to emerge, such as nahwu, language, and balāghah, along with the development of distinct new ideas. The unique terminology introduced by the Kufah school began to take shape.

First Generation

In the first generation, nahwu still followed the Basrah school of thought, as there was not yet any foundational basis established by Kufah scholars. In this generation, there were two major figures in the science of nahwu (Prihantoro, 2015). The first was al-Ru'āsī, whose full name was Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, and he was the nephew of Mu'ādh al-Farrā'ī. He was nicknamed al-Ru'āsī due to the large size of his head (Kojin, 2013). Al-Ru'āsī studied nahwu under Abū 'Amr along with Ibn al-'Alā'. His students included al-Kisā'ī and al-Farrā'. Among his writings were Kitāb al-Faṣl, which was the first

book to appear in the Kufah tradition of nahwu. In addition to al-Faṣl, his other works included Kitāb al-Taṣghīr, Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān, and al-Ibtidā' al-Kabīr wa al-Ṣaghīr. Most of al-Ru'āsī's thought, as expressed in his works, focused on the field of taṣrīf, which deals with ṣarf (Kojin, 2013).

According to reports, al-Ru'āsī was an expert in grammar whose expertise was unmatched by any other figure in this field. He died in Kufah in the year 175 AH, during the reign of al-Rashid (Ṭanṭawiy, 2011). The second figure was Mu'ādh al-Ḥarrā', whose full name was Abū Muslim Mu'ādh ibn Muslim al-Ḥarrā' (Prihantoro, 2015). He lived in Kufah and spread the principles of the Basrah school of nahwu together with al-Ru'āsī. Mu'ādh al-Ḥarrā' was also the first to compile a book on ta'rīf. He had a close relationship with the famous poet al-Kumayt ibn Zayd. He died in Kufah in the year 187 AH (Kojin, 2013). One of al-Ḥarrā''s contributions to the field of nahwu was his discussion on the word matā (متى), regarding whether it falls under the category of ism or ḥarf. In one quote: ja'altuhu fī matā kamī, he explained that matā in this context means wasaṭ (middle), and therefore he classified matā here as an ism. Other scholars argued that the classification of matā as either ism or ḥarf depends on its placement in context.

Second Generation

The hallmark of the second-generation scholars was their strategic approach in developing their knowledge. This included engaging in discussions with scholars from Basrah and secretly reading the book authored by Sibawayh (Prihantoro, 2015). In this generation, there was only one prominent nahwu scholar: al-Kisā'ī (119–189 AH). His full name was Abū Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ḥamzah. He was nicknamed al-Kisā'ī because during the iḥrām ritual he wore a thick black garment called kisā'. He was of Persian descent. Al-Kisā'ī studied qirā'ah (Qur'anic recitation) from an early age under four teachers: Sulaymān ibn Arqam, Abū Bakr Shu'bah ibn 'Ayyāsh, Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah, and Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt (Fachruddin, 2021).

Historians regard al-Kisā'ī as the founder of the Kufah school (Madhhab Kūfah). He established a grammatical school that was more descriptive—recording language as it was used compared to the more prescriptive approach of the Basrah school, which emphasized conformity with linguistic ideals. He also believed that the language of certain tribes in urban areas remained valid as sources of correct usage. This marked a significant divide between the approaches of Sibawayh (Basrah) and al-Kisā'ī (Kufah). Al-Kisā'ī authored several important works, including in the field of qirā'ah. Among his nahwu-related books were: Mukhtaṣar al-Naḥw, al-Ḥudūd fī al-Naḥw, and Mā Talḥanu fīhi al-'Āmm (on common grammatical errors made by the masses). Al-Kisā'ī passed away before a planned journey with Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd to Khurāsān. He fell seriously ill and died in a village near Rayy in 189 AH. He left behind several students, including Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, Muḥammad ibn Sa'dān al-Ḍarīr, 'Alī ibn Ḥāzim al-Liḥyānī, Hishām ibn Mu'āwiyah al-Ḍarīr, and the leading successor of the Kufah school of nahwu, al-Farrā'.

Al-Kisā'ī proposed several arguments regarding his qirā'ah interpretations (Ḍaif, 1986):

- a. Conjunction ('aṭf) is permissible for both inna and its noun (ism). The grammatical position assigned to inna and its ism is nominative (raf'), which also applies to the conjoined element (ma'ṭūf). This is illustrated in the following verse:

إن الذين آمنوا والذي هادوا والصابئون والنصارى من آمن بالله واليوم الآخر وعمل صالحا فلا
خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون

Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews and the Sabians and the Christians – whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteousness – there will be no fear upon them, nor will they grieve.
[Qur'an, al-Mā'idah: 69]

- b. The particle *inna* can function as a negator when it enters a nominal sentence, similar in effect to *laysa*. In such a usage, *inna* raises the *ism* (subject) and assigns the accusative (*naṣb*) to the *khavar* (predicate). This appears in the *qirā'ah* of Sa'īd ibn Jubayr:

إن الذين تدعون من دون الله عبادا أمثالكم

Indeed, those you call upon besides Allah are servants like yourselves.

- c. A word in which the final *nūn* is dropped may also omit the imperative particle *lām al-amr*. Al-Kisā'ī formulated a rule for such cases, stating that the *lām al-amr* can be omitted if it is preceded by the word *qul* ("say"). An example is found in the verse:

قل لعبادي الذين آمنوا يقيموا الصلاة

Say to My servants who have believed that they should establish prayer

Third Generation

In this generation, writing in the fields of religious sciences, linguistics, and *sharaf* began to flourish. During this time, the focus on *nahwu* and *sharaf* also started to be separated, accompanied by a particular attention and effort to correct common spoken language errors. In this period, the debate between *Bashrah* and *Kufah* spread widely, leading to the emergence of the term *Nahwu Kufah* (Kojin, 2013). There are four prominent figures from this third generation:

First, *al-Ahmar*, whose real name was *Abu al-Hasan bin Ali al-Hasan*. *Al-Ahmar* was a soldier who served in the court of *ar-Rashid*. In the palace, *al-Ahmar* met *al-Kisā'ī*, who at that time was a *mu'addib* (educator) of the caliph's son. *Al-Ahmar* and *al-Kisā'ī* had a close relationship, to the point that *al-Ahmar* was thought to be a friend of *al-Kisā'ī*. When tension arose between the caliph and *al-Kisā'ī*, *al-Ahmar* was chosen to replace him. *Al-Ahmar* had knowledge of *nahwu*, making him part of the *nahwu* scholars of *Kufah* under the guidance of *al-Kisā'ī*. *Al-Ahmar* died in the year 194 H (Kojin, 2013).

Second, *al-Farrā'* (144–207 H). His real name was *Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Ziyad al-Farrā'* (Kojin, 2013). *Al-Farrā'* was of Persian descent. He studied under several teachers, including *Abu Bakr ibn 'Ayyash*, *Sufyan ibn 'Uyainah*, *Abu Ja'far ar-Ru'asi*, *Yunus ibn Habib* (a *nahwu* scholar from *Basrah*), and *al-Kisā'ī* (Fachruddin, 2021). Among his students were *Salamah bin 'Ashim* and *Muhammad bin al-Jahm* (Kojin, 2013). Some of his works include *Ma'ani al-Qur'an* and *al-Mudzakkar wa al-Muannats* (Kojin, 2013). *Al-Farrā'* adhered to the *Mu'tazilah* school of theology, which led him to read many books on logic (*mantiq*) and philosophy. As a result, many historians noted that his works contained many philosophical terms. Some new terms introduced by *al-Farrā'* include: *al-*

khilaf (for khabar syibh al-jumlah), al-fi'l al-waqi' (for fi'il muta'addi), alladzi lam yusamma fa'iluhu (for fi'il madhi al-mabni li al-majhul), al-I'mad (for dhamir sya'n and fashl), al-jahd (for nafi), laghw/hasyw (for extra letters, ziyadah), al-mahall (for zharaf), mufassir (for tamyiz), takrir/tabyin (for badal), 'athf an-nasaq (for conjunctions using particles, 'athaf) and others (Fachruddin, 2021).

Third, Hisyam ad-Darir. His real name was Abu 'Abdillah Hisyam ibn Mu'awiyah ad-Darir. He was a student of al-Kisā'i and a strong adherent of the Kufah school. Some of his views differed from those of his teacher, for example: the nun in the word mu'addibnī is not nun wiqayah, but rather a replacement for tanwin. Another issue is his opinion allowing na'at (attributive adjective) to be assigned to different syntactic positions, such as between fa'il and maf'ul bih, for example: ضارب زيد عمرا الظريفان (Zayd and 'Amr, both intelligent, were hitting each other). Some of his works include al-Ḥudūd, al-Mukhtashar, and al-Qiyās. Fourth, al-Lihyani. His real name was Abu Hasan Ali Ibn Mubarak. The title al-Lihyani was given as a sign of respect for his lihyah (beard). He died in 220 H. Besides studying with al-Kisā'i, he also studied with Abu Zayd, Abu Ubaidah, and others (Ṭanṭawiy, 2011).

Fourth Generation

In this fourth generation, the writing of works began to decline. Opinions in the fields of nahwu and sharf did not emerge, as they were based on the views of earlier nahwu scholars from Kufah. There are three prominent figures from this generation: First, Ibn Sa'dan (161–231 H). His full name was Abu Ja'far ad-Dharir Muhammad bin Sa'dan. He studied nahwu under the leading scholars of nahwu from Kufah. Some of the works he produced include al-Jāmi' and al-Mujarrad. Ibn Sa'dan died in 231 H during the reign of al-Wathiq bin al-Mu'tashim (Kojin, 2013). Second, at-Tuwwāl. His full name was Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Ahmad ibn Abdullah at-Tuwwāl. He was born in Kufah and later moved to Baghdad, where he attended qirā'ah sessions with Abu 'Umar and al-Dūrī (Ṭanṭawiy, 2011). At-Tuwwāl's thinking on the word rajā' includes the view that la'alla carries a sense of uncertainty. Third, Ibn Qadim. His full name was Ja'far Muhammad bin Abdillah bin Qadim. He studied under al-Farrā', benefiting from his expertise in nahwu and ta'lil. Even before the rise of the Abbasids, Ibn Qadim had already established relations with scholars. His works include al-Kāfi and al-Mukhtashar. He passed away in Baghdad in the year 251 H (Ṭanṭawiy, 2011).

Fifth Generation

This generation was characterized by a broad knowledge base that included nahwu, language, and balāghah. A key figure of this generation was Tha'lab. He was born in 200 H. His full name was Abu al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn Yahyā ibn Yazīd. Although of Persian descent, he was born and raised in Baghdad. In his childhood, he studied various subjects such as reading, writing, memorizing the Qur'an, and Arabic poetry. Among his works are Majālis Tha'lab, al-Farāid, Qawā'id al-Syi'r, Ikhtilāfu al-Nahwiyyīn, and Mā Ya'rif wa Mā Lā Ya'rif (Ḍaif, 1986). Tha'lab was also known as the imam of the Kufah school in nahwu and language. He was recognized for his sincerity in Arabic dialects and his knowledge of foreign languages besides Arabic.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support and, in some respects, challenge prior academic views regarding the characteristics and development of the Kufah school of Arabic grammar. One of the strongest points of agreement concerns Kufah's flexible approach to grammar. The Scholars (Harianto, 2018; Indah, 2025; Kamal, 2022) emphasize the school's openness in accepting linguistic variations even those considered *syāz* (irregular) if they were traceable to native usage. This aligns with the present study's finding that the Kufah school incorporated both rural and urban linguistic sources and was grounded in descriptive linguistic principles rather than prescriptive logic. The acceptance of everyday speech, poetic diction, and colloquial expressions as valid grammatical data confirms Kufah's commitment to documenting actual language use over rigid normativity.

Moreover, the contribution of Kufan scholars like al-Farrā' in introducing new grammatical terminology (e.g., al-jahd, al-khilāf, al-l'mād) affirms what An Nabiil and Sarifudin (2024) observed regarding the school's terminological creativity. Folorunsho (2019) further characterizes Kufah as representing the "individualistic prerogative" in Arabic grammar, allowing scholars intellectual liberty in formulating grammatical concepts. This idea is strongly supported by the third-generation productivity documented in this research, especially among figures like al-Farrā' and Hisyām al-Ḍarīr. The pedagogical benefit of this approach is also corroborated by Nuha et al. (2024), who found that Kufah's methods were more effective in *nahwu* instruction, owing to their adaptability and contextual relevance.

However, some findings in this study raise important nuances or counterpoints to earlier claims. For example, while many previous studies celebrate the originality of al-Kisā'i, the current analysis shows that his early strategies involved secret consultation of Sibawayh's *Kitāb*, suggesting a latent dependence on Basrah foundational works (Prihantoro, 2015). This complicates the dichotomy often drawn between Kufah and Basrah and suggests a more intertwined intellectual relationship. Similarly, the study's depiction of the first generation (particularly al-Ru'āsī and Mu'ādh al-Ḥarrā') as heavily reliant on Basrah tradition contrasts with Abdullah (2021) portrayal of Kufan scholars as operating within a dynamic and independent linguistic network rooted in Islamic scholarly traditions.

Another point of divergence appears in the portrayal of the fourth generation. Earlier research, such as that of Mohammed Alkiyumi (2023), tends to highlight Kufah's sustained innovation, especially through figures like al-Khalīl and his lexical-mathematical contributions. Yet, the findings here indicate that during the fourth generation, Kufan grammatical production plateaued, with scholars predominantly reiterating previous opinions rather than generating new theories. This phase of stagnation challenges the notion of continuous Kufan dynamism and suggests that the development of the school was not uniformly progressive across generations.

Nevertheless, this decline was offset by a revival in the fifth generation, particularly through the work of Tha'lab, whose interdisciplinary knowledge encompassed grammar, poetry, and *balāghah*. This supports Alkiyumi's (2023) view of Kufah's eventual return to innovation in other linguistic domains, such as phonology and lexicography. Yet, instead of seeing this solely as a linear success story, the present research frames it as part of a cyclical process of innovation, decline, and renewal offering a more historically grounded and balanced narrative. In sum, while this study affirms the central claims about Kufah's empirical, inclusive, and descriptivist orientation in earlier

literature, it also nuances these views by highlighting inter-school dependencies, generational variability, and phases of intellectual regression. These insights enrich the academic understanding of the Kufah school not merely as a reactive alternative to Basrah but as a tradition with its own internal dynamics and complex developmental trajectory.

CONCLUSION

This study elucidates the distinctive characteristics and periodization of the Kufah nahwu scholars, addressing the research problem of understanding the evolution of this Arabic linguistic school in relation to its Basrah counterpart. By systematically analyzing the contributions of five generations of Kufah scholars, the research highlights the school's unique approach to grammar, characterized by its openness to diverse linguistic sources and its descriptive methodology. The findings underscore the importance of figures such as al-Kisā'ī and al-Farrā' in shaping the intellectual landscape of nahwu, while also revealing phases of stagnation and renewal within the tradition. Future research is recommended to further explore the implications of these findings on contemporary Arabic linguistic studies, particularly in examining the interplay between the Kufah and Basrah schools and their relevance in modern linguistic discourse.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author is responsible for designing the research, collecting and analyzing the data, and drafting the initial version of the article. The second and third authors contribute by strengthening the theoretical framework, conducting literature reviews, and assisting in the development of the argumentation and interpretation of findings. The fourth and fifth authors act as supervisors who provide academic guidance, methodological direction, and critical revisions to improve the structure and clarity of the manuscript before final submission.

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