

Pedagogical Issues in Arabic Language Teaching: A Case Study of Learner Readiness and Classroom Practice

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Abstract

Arabic has an important role in Islamic education, but its learning in madrasahs still faces various pedagogical problems that hinder the development of students' communicative competence. This study aims to analyze the pedagogical problems of Arabic language learning at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Semarang by examining the relationship between students' learning readiness and classroom learning practices. The research uses a qualitative case study approach supported by descriptive quantitative data. Data were obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and tracing of students' educational backgrounds. The results of the study show four main problems, namely the learning readiness of diverse students due to differences in educational backgrounds (40% of the students entered the madrasah without systematic prior instruction in Arabic); learning that is still teacher-centered so that student participation is limited; emphasis on reading and grammar rather than communication skills; and the lack of use of Arabic as a language of communication in the classroom. These findings show that pedagogical problems are influenced by the interaction between students' learning readiness and learning practices. Therefore, diagnostic assessments, differentiated

learning, and increased communicative use of Arabic need to be implemented to strengthen the quality of learning.

Abstrak

Bahasa Arab memiliki peran penting dalam pendidikan Islam, tetapi pembelajarannya di madrasah masih menghadapi berbagai permasalahan pedagogis yang menghambat perkembangan kompetensi komunikatif peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis permasalahan pedagogis dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab di MAN 1 Semarang dengan mengkaji hubungan antara kesiapan belajar peserta didik dan praktik pembelajaran di kelas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif yang didukung oleh data kuantitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, analisis dokumen, serta penelusuran latar belakang pendidikan peserta didik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat permasalahan utama, yaitu kesiapan belajar peserta didik yang beragam akibat perbedaan latar belakang pendidikan; pembelajaran yang masih berpusat pada guru sehingga membatasi partisipasi aktif peserta didik; penekanan pembelajaran pada keterampilan membaca dan penguasaan tata bahasa dibandingkan keterampilan berkomunikasi; dan terbatasnya penggunaan bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa komunikasi di kelas. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa permasalahan pedagogis dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab dipengaruhi oleh interaksi antara kesiapan belajar peserta didik dan praktik pembelajaran di kelas. Oleh karena itu, penerapan asesmen diagnostik, pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, serta peningkatan penggunaan bahasa Arab secara komunikatif perlu dilakukan untuk memperkuat kualitas pembelajaran bahasa Arab.

المخلص

تؤدي اللغة العربية دورا مهما في التعليم الإسلامي، إلا أن تعليمها في المدارس الإسلامية (المدارس) ما يزال يواجه مشكلات تربوية تحد من تنمية الكفاية التواصلية لدى المتعلمين. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل المشكلات التربوية في

تعليم اللغة العربية بالمدرسة الثانوية الإسلامية الحكومية الأولى بسمارانج، من خلال بحث العلاقة بين استعداد المتعلمين للتعليم والممارسات التدريسية داخل الصف. واعتمدت الدراسة منهج دراسة الحالة النوعية مدعوما ببيانات كمية وصفية، وجمعت البيانات من خلال الملاحظة الصفية، والمقابلات شبه المقننة، وتحليل الوثائق، وتتبع الخلفيات التعليمية للمتعلمين. وأظهرت النتائج أربع مشكلات رئيسة، تتمثل في: تباين استعداد المتعلمين نتيجة اختلاف خلفياتهم التعليمية، واستمرار هيمنة المعلم على عملية التدريس بما يحد من مشاركة المتعلمين، وتركيز التدريس على مهارات القراءة والقواعد اللغوية أكثر من تنمية مهارات التواصل، ومحدودية استخدام اللغة العربية لغة للتواصل داخل الصف. وتشير هذه النتائج إلى أن المشكلات التربوية في تعليم اللغة العربية تتأثر بالتفاعل بين استعداد المتعلمين للتعليم والممارسات التدريسية داخل الصف. ولذلك، توصي الدراسة بتطبيق التقويم التشخيصي، واعتماد التدريس المتمايز، وتوسيع استخدام اللغة العربية في التواصل الصفّي؛ بما يساهم في تعزيز جودة تعليم اللغة العربية.

Keywords: Arabic language teaching; Islamic senior high school; learner readiness; pedagogical issues; target language use

Introduction

Arabic occupies a unique position in the Islamic education system in Indonesia. In addition to functioning as the language of Islamic science, Arabic is also taught as a subject at various levels of formal education. Unlike most foreign languages that are studied primarily for communication purposes, Arabic provides direct access to students to understand the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic intellectual treasures more broadly. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions view Arabic as not just an additional subject, but as an essential element in the formation of students' religious and academic competencies.¹

¹ Izzuddin Izzuddin et al., "The Curriculum Development of Arabic Instruction to Improve Student's Writing Skills," *Universal Journal of*

Despite having a pivotal position, Arabic language learning in Islamic schools in Indonesia still faces persistent pedagogical problems that recur from year to year. Many learners have been learning Arabic for many years, but have not been able to develop adequate communicative competencies, particularly in spontaneous speaking and interacting skills. The gap between the importance of the position of Arabic in Islamic education and the learning outcomes of students shows that these problems are not solely related to the content of the curriculum or the allocation of learning time, but also reflect the various pedagogical conditions that take place in the classroom.

In the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, the gap carries a more fundamental meaning. Arabic is seen not only as a language skill, but as the epistemological foundation of Islamic education. Ahmed views Islamic education as a process of forming *adab*, where Arabic functions as both a medium of knowledge transmission and as an object of learning.² In line with this view, Dangor emphasized that deep understanding of the Qur'an and primary Islamic sources requires direct mastery of Arabic, making it integral to intellectual development, not merely an additional goal.³ Similarly, Wan Daud explained that Arabic acts as a bridge connecting the sciences of revelation with contemporary disciplines in Islamic education.⁴ However, empirical research

Educational Research 8, no. 9 (2020): 4261–72, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080952>.

² Farah Ahmed, "An Exploration of Naquib Al-Attas' Theory of Islamic Education as Ta'dīb as an 'Indigenous' Educational Philosophy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 8 (2018): 786–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1247685>.

³ Suleman Dangor, "Islamization of Disciplines: Towards an Indigenous Educational System," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 37, no. 4 (2005): 519–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2005.00138.x>.

⁴ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1998).

examining whether learning practices in Indonesian madrasahs realize these educational goals remains limited.

Classroom practices show that students' communicative skills are not yet adequately developed. Arabic teachers consistently report that students struggle to use Arabic outside textbook activities, while the learning process remains dominated by grammar explanation and text meaning rather than communicative activities. Consequently, many learners study Arabic for years without enough confidence to engage in authentic communication, a problem that persists into higher education and affects readiness for Islamic studies that assume prior Arabic proficiency.

This condition is increasingly complex in Indonesia. Arabic is taught in a multilingual society where Indonesian is the national language, regional languages serve daily communication, and Arabic is used mainly for religion and Islamic science. Unlike environments with wider social exposure to the target language, students' opportunities to encounter Arabic naturally outside class are sharply limited, making the classroom the main—often the only—setting for interaction. Therefore, pedagogical decisions related to language use, classroom interaction patterns, and learning design greatly determine the success of the learning process.⁵

Previous studies have examined Arabic learning in Indonesia from various perspectives, including curriculum development, teaching materials, teacher competence, digital technology, and communicative approaches.⁶ These studies

⁵ Subhan Zein, *Language Policy in Superdiverse Indonesia*, Routledge Studies in Sociolinguistics (New York: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429019739>.

⁶ Mohamad Zaka Al Farisi et al., "Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of 'Bandung,'" *Asian Education and Development Studies* 13, no. 2 (2024): 134–49, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-07-2023-0082>; Nurul Hanani et al., "An Eclectic Approach to Arabic Language Education: Implementing Kitab Al-Amsilah At-Tashrifayah in Modern Indonesian Pesantrens," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024): 192–206,

expanded understanding of effective practices and offered innovations to improve learning quality. However, most focused on evaluating methods or specific interventions, while attention to the institutional conditions and classroom dynamics that affect the implementation of these approaches in daily practice is relatively limited.

One aspect receiving little attention is learner readiness. In second language acquisition, readiness refers not only to initial vocabulary or grammar mastery, but also to cognitive resources, motivation, and prior experiences that enable learners to engage effectively with new input. When readiness differs significantly among learners, the same approach can produce highly diverse experiences even in one classroom.⁷ Although widely discussed in second language acquisition research, its pedagogical implications for Arabic learning in Indonesian Islamic schools remain underexplored.

The importance of student readiness is evident in the context of madrasahs in Indonesia, considering that students

<https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i2.38651>; Aminudin Hehsan et al., "Digital Muhadathah: Framework Model Development for Digital Arabic Language Learning," in *ICT: Cyber Security and Applications*, ed. Amit Joshi et al., vol. 916, Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), 13–29, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-0744-7_2; Agus Riwanda et al., "Empowering Asynchronous Arabic Language Learning Through PDF Hyperlink Media," *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 25, no. 1 (2024): 66–88, <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v25i1.7425>; Zuhannan et al., "Enhancing Communicative Arabic Teaching: Evaluating the Al-Arabiyah Baina Yadaik Model," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 15, no. 3 (2025): 318–35, <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2025-0100>; Ahmad Abdull Ahasiri, "Training Needs to Develop the Professional of Arabic Language Teachers," *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences* 17, no. 9 (2022): 3450–65, <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v17i9.8086>.

⁷ Noorafini Kassim et al., "Malaysian Non-Arabic Speaking Learners' Readiness in a Virtual Second Language Learning Environment," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 13, no. 1 (2023): 114–30, <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i1.58271>; Karen Lichtman and Bill VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later," *Foreign Language Annals* 54, no. 2 (2021): 283–305, <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12552>.

enter secondary education through diverse educational backgrounds. Some of the students are graduates of Islamic junior high schools (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah/MTs*) who have been learning Arabic for several years as part of the curriculum. On the other hand, some of them come from general junior high schools (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama/SMP*) who have little, if any, experience in learning Arabic. This condition causes students in one class to start the learning process with a highly varied level of language mastery, communication experience, and Arabic literacy skills.⁸ This diversity is a challenge for teachers because it is difficult to accommodate through a uniform learning approach.

From a pedagogical point of view, differences in the level of readiness of students have the potential to affect various decisions made by teachers during the learning process. Teachers can adjust the speed of material delivery, emphasize explicit grammar explanations, reduce communication activities in the classroom, or use the first language more often to help students with lower initial abilities. These adjustments can indeed help classroom management in the short term, but at the same time have the potential to reduce students' opportunities to get language input and interact using Arabic in a meaningful way. In fact, both aspects are important prerequisites for second language acquisition.⁹ However, empirical evidence on how students' readiness affects these pedagogical decisions is still relatively limited in the study of Arabic language learning.

⁸ Akmaliah Akmaliah et al., "Child-Friendly Teaching Approach for Arabic Language in Indonesian Islamic Boarding School," *International Journal of Language Education* 5, no. 1 (2021): 501–14, <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v5i1.15297>.

⁹ Chaochang Wang, "Two Affective Variables and Language Learners' Perceptions of Classroom Interaction," *The Journal of AsiaTEFL* 14, no. 1 (2017): 16–31, <https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2017.14.1.2.16>; Lichtman and VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later."

Therefore, understanding pedagogical problems in Arabic learning cannot rest on evaluating techniques or methods separately. The study must consider the interdependent relationships among student characteristics, classroom interaction, institutional policies, and context-specific practices. Qualitative case studies are relevant because they allow pedagogical phenomena to be studied holistically in their natural institutional environment, rather than as stand-alone variables.¹⁰

Based on this background, this study aims to examine various pedagogical problems in learning Arabic at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Semarang, a state Islamic senior high school in Central Java, Indonesia. In contrast to research that focuses solely on learning techniques, this study seeks to explain how students' readiness intersects with learning practices in the classroom to shape the implementation of Arabic language learning. By linking the findings of classroom observation with theory on student readiness and second language acquisition, this study is, to our knowledge, among the first to examine readiness-driven pedagogical decision-making at the grade level in an Indonesian MAN, thereby offering a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of Arabic language learning in mid-level madrasahs in Indonesia.

This study uses a qualitative case study design to examine pedagogical problems in Arabic language learning at MAN 1 Semarang, Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it

¹⁰ Julia L Sharp et al., "A Mixed Methods Sampling Methodology for a Multisite Case Study," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 6, no. 1 (2012): 34–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689811417133>; Robert Stake and Merel Visse, "Case Study Research," in *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)* (Elsevier, 2023), 85–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11010-3>; Bedrettin Yazan, "Three Approaches to Case Study Methods in Education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake," *The Qualitative Report* 20, no. 2 (2015): 134–52, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2102>.

allows learning practices to be analyzed in a natural institutional context, rather than as a separate variable.¹¹ The research is supported by descriptive quantitative data on students' educational backgrounds to describe the diversity of students' characteristics, not to test statistical relationships.¹² MAN 1 Semarang was chosen purposively because it accepts students from various educational backgrounds, both graduates of MTs and SMP, thus providing a relevant context to examine the influence of students' readiness on learning practices.¹³ The research participants consisted of Arabic teachers who taught Grade 10, with the involvement of a number of students as supporting informants to enrich the interpretation of the observation results.

Data were collected over three months in the first semester of the 2025/2026 school year through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document

¹¹ John W Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (2007): 236–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>; Ricky Lam, "Investigating Assessment as Learning in Second Language Writing: A Qualitative Research Perspective," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920938572>; Toni Mäkipää, "Upper Secondary Students' Perceptions of Feedback Literacy in Second Language Learning in Finland – A Qualitative Case Study," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 143 (2024): 104554, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104554>; Stake and Visse, "Case Study Research"; Yazan, "Three Approaches to Case Study Methods in Education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake."

¹² Nataliya V Ivankova et al., "Using Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design: From Theory to Practice," *Field Methods* 18, no. 1 (2006): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05282260>; Nancy L Leech and Anthony J Onwuegbuzie, "A Typology of Mixed Methods Research Designs," *Quality & Quantity* 43, no. 2 (2009): 265–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-007-9105-3>; Isop Syafei et al., "The Development of Student Reading Skills in Arabic for Reading Islamic Classical Books Using the Arabic Learning Model at Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 14, no. 5 (2024): 1381–92, <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1405.10>.

¹³ Steve Campbell et al., "Purposive Sampling: Complex or Simple? Research Case Examples," *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25, no. 8 (2020): 652–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>.

analysis, thus allowing triangulation between methods and between data sources.¹⁴ Observations were focused on classroom interaction patterns, language use, learning strategies, student participation, and teachers' responses to differences in student readiness.¹⁵ Interviews were conducted with teachers and students using Indonesian or Arabic according to the participants' preferences, while document analysis included curriculum, lesson plans, textbooks, and administrative documents to compare planning with learning practices.¹⁶ Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model through data reduction, data presentation, and repeated drawing and verification of conclusions.¹⁷ The credibility of the findings is maintained through triangulation, member checking, reflective recording, and peer debriefing.¹⁸ All research procedures have obtained ethical approval, accompanied by written consent from all participants or

¹⁴ Andrew K Shenton, "Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects," *Education for Information* 22, no. 2 (2004): 63–75, <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>.

¹⁵ Simon Borg, "Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching: A Review of Research on What Language Teachers Think, Know, Believe, and Do," *Language Teaching* 36, no. 2 (2003): 81–109, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444803001903>; Jack C Richards, "Teaching English through English: Proficiency, Pedagogy and Performance," *RELC Journal* 48, no. 1 (2017): 7–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688217690059>.

¹⁶ Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

¹⁷ Susana Verdinelli and Norma I Scagnoli, "Data Display in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 12, no. 1 (2013): 359–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200117>.

¹⁸ Roni Berger, "Now I See It, Now I Don't: Researcher's Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Research* 15, no. 2 (2015): 219–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>; Shenton, "Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects."

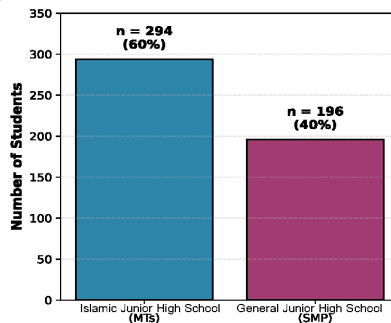
guardians of students, and ensure the confidentiality of participants' identities.¹⁹

Results

Diverse Student Readiness

Administrative records from MAN 1 Semarang indicate that the 490 Grade 10 students enrolled in the 2025/2026 academic year came from two different educational backgrounds. Of these, 294 students (60%) graduated from Islamic junior high schools (MTs), whereas 196 students (40%) graduated from general junior high schools (SMP). This distribution indicates that a substantial proportion of students entered the madrasah without systematic prior instruction in Arabic. School admission records documented students' previous educational backgrounds but did not classify them according to their Arabic language proficiency. Furthermore, no diagnostic assessment was administered at the beginning of the academic year to determine students' readiness across different Arabic language skills. The distribution of students' educational backgrounds is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Distribution of Grade 10 Students by Educational Background



As illustrated in Figure 1, students entered MAN 1 Semarang with substantially different educational

¹⁹ Jack C Richards, "Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central, and Backward Design," *RELC Journal* 44, no. 1 (2013): 5–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688212473293>.

backgrounds, indicating considerable variation in their prior exposure to Arabic. This diversity became evident during classroom observations, where differences in learner readiness were reflected in students' reading ability, vocabulary knowledge, and classroom participation.

Observations in the first weeks of the odd semester show marked differences in students' ability to participate in Arabic learning, visible in recognizing *hijaiyah letters*, distinguishing letter shapes, applying *harakat* when reading aloud, and speed of responding to teacher instructions such as opening certain pages or reading simple sentences. Some students read simple texts fluently without significant pauses, while others still need repeated teacher guidance when reading or spelling words. Some also struggle in group reading, stopping midway or mispronouncing letters similar in shape and sound.

Variation in readiness also appears in vocabulary mastery. Some students already understand basic vocabulary used in learning, while others rely on the teacher's translation. Interviews showed teachers recognized these differences from the start of the school year and felt they affect the pace of early lessons; they attributed the differences to students' educational backgrounds. Students from junior high school also tended to be more passive in initial meetings than MTs graduates.

Overall, the findings show that the heterogeneity of student readiness is a key characteristic of the classroom at the beginning of the school year. The difference in readiness can be seen in reading ability, vocabulary mastery, and speed of responding to learning activities. However, the school does not have a diagnostic mechanism or specific preparation program to identify and address these skills gaps before learning takes place.

Limited Class Interaction

Observations in several Grade 10 classes reveal that Arabic language learning is still dominated by teachers. Most of the

learning time is spent explaining the material, while opportunities for learners to engage in interactive activities, either through questions, responses, or direct interaction with the learning material, remain severely limited.

Classroom communication is generally one-way. Teachers convey information through explanations, text readings, and presentation of language rules, while students mostly listen and take notes. Questions are usually addressed to the whole class without deeper exploration of answers. In grammar teaching, rules are explained, examples presented, then material recorded, with students rarely given chances to discover or apply patterns in new contexts.

The number of students in each class ranges from 38 to 42 people. This condition affects the learning management pattern which tends to be oriented towards the classroom as a whole, so that activities that require individual interaction and cooperation between students are relatively rare. In addition, the fixed seating layout, with the position of students lined up facing the board, further limits the interaction space between students. During the observation, teachers also did not apply variations of seating arrangements that could encourage dialogue, discussion, or collaborative learning.

Interviews showed the classroom-management pattern was applied consistently across classes regardless of material or skill taught; the teacher cited large class size and limited time as the main considerations. Overall, teacher-student and student-student interaction remains limited in intensity: learning is teacher-centric and opportunities for active student participation are not optimally developed.

Conventional Grammar Learning

The results of observations show that Arabic grammar learning in this school is still dominated by conventional approaches. Teachers generally start learning by explaining the grammar rules directly, then providing examples of application, and only after that provide limited opportunities

for students to observe or draw conclusions from the rules learned. The explanations of the material are mostly delivered in Indonesian, while the use of Arabic terms is only done in certain parts that are considered necessary. During the lesson, the teacher writes down the grammar rules on the board, reads them, and then explains each element in detail, while the students copy the explanation into a notebook.

Examples used in learning are generally taken from textbooks and read or repeated by students together or in turn; no examples derived from students' own speech or language construction were observed. New-material delivery often slowed because some students had not mastered earlier content, prompting teachers to repeat explanations or review prior material, reducing time for new material.

The interview reinforced these observations. The teacher explained that students' limited mastery of prerequisite material affects the order of grammar delivery and often forces repeating the same explanation several times in one meeting, a condition also found in other classes. Application of grammar rules in practice is generally limited to written questions, individually or in groups, without systematic monitoring of each student's development. Grammar learning thus follows a fixed, teacher-centered pattern with limited strategy variation and low student involvement in building or discovering rules.

The Limited Use of Arabic in Class Communication

The results of observations show that the use of Arabic as a language of communication in learning remains severely limited. In most classes, Arabic is only used in the opening and closing activities of learning, such as greetings and prayers, while almost all interactions during the learning process are in Indonesian. Teachers use Indonesian to explain vocabulary, explain grammar rules, deliver instructions, ask questions, and manage the course of learning. Similarly, students almost always respond to the teacher in Indonesian.

Observations also show that opportunities for learners to use Arabic in meaningful communication situations are almost non-existent. During the learning process, no activities were found that required students to use Arabic to communicate, for example through simple dialogues, conversation in pairs, or question and answer activities. When students are asked to read Arabic texts aloud, the activity is generally not followed by a discussion about the content of reading using Arabic. Instead, the teacher immediately switches to Indonesian to explain the meaning of the text that has been read.

Interviews revealed that teachers deliberately limited classroom Arabic to suit students' ability, viewing Indonesian as the most effective way to ensure understanding. Observations show the classroom environment provides no continuous Arabic exposure; Arabic use is confined to textbook material and has not become a medium of communication. Arabic thus functions more as an object of learning than a language of interaction, leaving learners little space to use it in everyday communication.

Discussion

Student Readiness as the Foundation of Classroom Pedagogy

The data show that student readiness forms the main foundation shaping Arabic learning at MAN 1 Semarang. The variations in reading ability, vocabulary mastery, and participation observed in the classroom reflect not only differences in individual abilities, but also gaps in learning experience that students bring from earlier levels of education. This heterogeneity becomes increasingly prominent because learning proceeds without prior diagnostic assessment or differentiated instruction. Teachers are therefore faced with managing a class of students with highly diverse levels of readiness, so readiness shapes the entire learning process, not just the initial conditions each student brings. These varied

readiness profiles align with earlier classroom-level findings at a madrasah, where weak Arabic reading fluency directly hindered students' progress in other subjects.²⁰

This finding is in line with the theory of meaningful learning which emphasizes that new knowledge will be easier to understand if it can be linked to the knowledge structure that students already have. When the cognitive structure has not developed adequately or unevenly, the learning process becomes less optimal because teachers have to bridge differences in initial abilities at the same time. In the context of second language acquisition, learners' readiness also includes linguistic, cognitive, motivational, and experiential learning resources that allow learners to process language input effectively.²¹ Therefore, the difference in readiness not only affects the speed of learning, but also determines the extent to which students are able to take advantage of the available learning opportunities. Calafato and Tang found that limited linguistic ability in the early stages can hinder the processing of increasingly complex language inputs, thus impacting academic achievement and learning motivation.²² Likewise, students' difficulties in processing Arabic text inputs echo the reading-problem categories that Rizki mapped onto Arabic reading pedagogy.²³

²⁰ Nur Khikmah, "Problematika Membaca Teks Arab bagi Siswa Madrasah," *Alsina : Journal of Arabic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 47–66, <https://doi.org/10.21580/alsina.1.1.3666>.

²¹ Alaa Alzahrani, "LexArabic: A Receptive Vocabulary Size Test to Estimate Arabic Proficiency," *Behavior Research Methods* 56, no. 6 (2023): 5529–56, <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-023-02286-z>; Kassim et al., "Malaysian Non-Arabic Speaking Learners' Readiness in a Virtual Second Language Learning Environment"; Lichtman and VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later."

²² Raees Calafato and Fei Tang, "The Status of Arabic, Superdiversity, and Language Learning Motivation among Non-Arab Expats in the Gulf," *Lingua* 219 (2019): 24–38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2018.11.003>.

²³ Restu Budiansyah Rizki, "Mushkilāt al-Ṭalabah fī Qirā'at al-Nuṣuṣ al-'Arabīyah 'alā Asās Naẓariyat Muḥammad 'Alī al-Khūlī," *Alsina : Journal of*

The findings also expand the discussion of readiness in second language acquisition. Most previous studies positioned readiness as an individual characteristic associated with learners' learning success.²⁴ In contrast, this study shows readiness also has pedagogical implications at the classroom level. Differences in readiness affect teachers' decisions, such as adjusting the learning tempo, choosing material delivery strategies, and providing opportunities for students to interact using Arabic. Readiness thus shapes not only learning outcomes but also the pedagogical practices that develop during the learning process.

This interpretation reframes student readiness as both a pedagogical and an institutional issue. Improving Arabic learning is not a matter of better methods alone but requires institutional mechanisms to identify students' initial abilities on entry to the madrasah. Diagnostic assessment and differentiated learning thus become a precondition for an environment that accommodates learners' diverse readiness.

Teacher-Centered Learning as an Adaptive Response

The dominance of teacher-centered learning observed in this study cannot be understood solely as a teacher's pedagogical choice. The results of observations and interviews indicate that this pattern is a response to classroom conditions colored by a large number of students and a highly diverse level of learning readiness. In this situation, direct explanations are seen as the most possible way to maintain the implementation of learning while ensuring that all students gain an understanding of the material presented. Thus, the characteristics of teacher-centered learning in this study are

Arabic Studies 4, no. 2 (2022): 243–62, <https://doi.org/10.21580/alsina.4.2.13706>.

²⁴ Calafato and Tang, "The Status of Arabic, Superdiversity, and Language Learning Motivation among Non-Arab Expats in the Gulf"; Kassim et al., "Malaysian Non-Arabic Speaking Learners' Readiness in a Virtual Second Language Learning Environment."

more appropriately understood as a form of adaptation to classroom conditions than as a fixed teaching preference.

This interpretation aligns with social constructivism, which views language learning as developing through interaction, negotiation of meaning, and students' active involvement in building knowledge, not merely through teachers' delivery of information. However, when teachers face classes with varying levels of readiness, implementing interaction-based learning becomes more difficult, so direct explanation can be understood as an adaptive strategy to maintain continuity under less-than-ideal conditions.²⁵

However, such adaptive strategies also have pedagogical consequences. Reduced opportunities for active participation limit negotiation of meaning, collaborative discussion, and productive use of language, which are important components in second language acquisition because they let learners process, test, and develop competence through authentic interaction.²⁶ Thus, practices originally intended to accommodate learner heterogeneity may reduce the learning experience needed to improve communicative competence.

These findings provide a different perspective from some previous studies that generally place teacher-centered learning as a pedagogical weakness or low indicator of the application of communicative learning. This study shows that these learning patterns cannot be separated from the institutional context in which learning takes place. In a

²⁵ Afsheen Rezai et al., "Implementing Active Learning Approach to Promote Motivation, Reduce Anxiety, and Shape Positive Attitudes: A Case Study of EFL Learners," *Acta Psychologica* 253 (2025): 104704, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.104704>.

²⁶ Syihabuddin Syihabuddin et al., "The Acquisition of Nominal Gender Agreement: Praxeology Analysis of Arabic Second Language Text Book 'Silsilah Al-Lisaan,'" *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* 16, no. 4 (2024): 1055–68, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-11-2022-0369>; Lichtman and VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later"; Wang, "Two Affective Variables and Language Learners' Perceptions of Classroom Interaction."

classroom that has a high diversity of student readiness, the teacher's decision to maintain learning control is a form of adjustment to real conditions in the field. Therefore, the transformation towards more student-centered learning cannot be brought about through teaching method training alone, but also requires institutional support that is able to reduce the gap in student readiness from the beginning of learning. In other words, improving the quality of classroom interaction depends on the integration between teacher competency development and a learning system that is able to accommodate the diversity of students' initial abilities.

The Dominance of Grammar Learning and Its Implications for Communicative Competence

Arabic language learning at MAN 1 Semarang remains dominated by the explicit delivery of grammar rules,²⁷ while opportunities for students to build understanding through exploration and communicative use of language remain relatively limited. Although this pattern is often seen as a characteristic of traditional learning approaches, the results show that the dominance of grammar learning cannot be separated from classroom conditions colored by the diversity of student readiness. When some students have not mastered the prerequisite material, teachers tend to repeat the explanation of the rules before continuing with the next material. As a result, more learning time goes to ensuring understanding of language rules rather than to communication activities that demand more even readiness. The central role of nahwu in this cohort aligns with the findings of Solekhuudin et al., who reported that concept mapping of grammatical texts

²⁷ Abdul Haris, "Teaching Reading of Arabic Language in Indonesia: Reconstruction of the Contents and Scope of Nahwu Science," *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8, no. 2 (2022): 122–36, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911547>.

supports learning only when learner readiness is heterogeneous.²⁸

The findings can be explained through the perspective of second language acquisition which distinguishes between the mastery of explicit knowledge of language and the ability to use language communicatively. In this framework, mastery of grammar rules does contribute to the development of language skills, but does not automatically produce communicative competence if it is not accompanied by the opportunity to use language in meaningful interactions.²⁹ Thus, learning that focuses on explaining rules has the potential to increase students' declarative understanding, but does not necessarily encourage the development of the ability to use Arabic spontaneously in communication situations.

These findings also provide a different perspective on previous studies on Arabic language learning. A number of studies have discussed the effectiveness of communicative approaches, curriculum development, teacher competence, and learning media innovations as the main factors in improving the quality of Arabic language learning.³⁰ These

²⁸ Achmad Solekhuudin et al., "Efektivitas Penggunaan Peta Konsep Kitab Sharh Qaṭr al-Nadā wa-Ball al-Ṣadā pada pembelajaran Nahwu di Perguruan Tinggi Islam," *Alsina : Journal of Arabic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2023): 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.21580/alsina.5.1.21017>.

²⁹ William Littlewood, "Communication-Oriented Language Teaching: Where Are We Now? Where Do We Go from Here?," *Language Teaching* 47, no. 3 (2014): 349–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000134>; Eman Abdussalam Owen and Abu Bakar Razali, "The Effect of Communicative Activities on Libyan Secondary School Students' Speaking Performance in Malaysia," *International Journal of Instruction* 11, no. 4 (2018): 45–60, <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.1144a>; Lichtman and VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later"; Wang, "Two Affective Variables and Language Learners' Perceptions of Classroom Interaction."

³⁰ Al Farisi et al., "Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of 'Bandung'"; Hehsan et al., "Digital Muhadathah: Framework Model Development for Digital Arabic Language Learning"; Riwanda et al., "Empowering Asynchronous Arabic Language Learning Through PDF

studies generally focus on learning methods or interventions, while the factors that encourage teachers to maintain grammar-oriented learning patterns have not received much attention. The results of this study show that the dominance of grammar learning does not solely reflect the pedagogical preferences of teachers, but is also a consequence of teachers' efforts to adapt learning to classroom conditions that have highly diverse levels of student readiness.

The implication of these findings is that the transformation of Arabic language learning towards a more communicative approach cannot be achieved through a change in learning methods alone. The change also requires classroom conditions that allow students to have a relatively balanced learning readiness so that teachers do not have to allocate most of their learning time to repeat prerequisite materials. Thus, strengthening students' communicative competence needs to be seen as the result of the integration between learning readiness, classroom management, and learning strategies, not as a direct consequence of the application of a certain method.

Interaction between Student Readiness and Pedagogical Practice in Arabic Language Learning

Taken together, these four findings indicate that pedagogical problems in Arabic language learning do not stand alone, but form a series of interrelated challenges. The heterogeneity of students' educational backgrounds results in different levels of learning readiness from the beginning of entering the madrasah. These differences in readiness then affect various pedagogical decisions made by teachers during the learning process, including the tendency to maintain teacher-centered learning, provide explicit grammatical explanations, and limit the use of Arabic as a language of communication in the classroom. Thus, the pedagogical

Hyperlink Media"; Zulhannan et al., "Enhancing Communicative Arabic Teaching: Evaluating the Al-Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik Model."

practices observed in this study cannot be understood only as a methodological choice of the teacher, but also as a response to the characteristics of the learners faced in a particular learning context.

This interpretation reinforces the view that language learning is the result of a complex, reciprocal interaction between learner characteristics, teaching practices, and institutional context. In the study of second language acquisition, the success of learning is not only determined by the quality of the methods used by teachers, but also by the readiness of students to use language input, participate in interactions, and build new knowledge through language experiences.³¹ Therefore, the same learning approach can result in a different learning experience when applied to a classroom with an imbalanced level of learner readiness. The findings of this study show that the heterogeneity of learning readiness is a factor that affects the effectiveness of the implementation of various learning approaches, including the communicative approach that has been widely recommended in learning Arabic.³²

On the other hand, the findings of this study also bring together the perspective of second language acquisition with the philosophy of Islamic education. In the Islamic educational tradition, Arabic is seen as the main medium for understanding the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic scientific treasures, so its mastery carries epistemological value that goes beyond mere

³¹ Kassim et al., "Malaysian Non-Arabic Speaking Learners' Readiness in a Virtual Second Language Learning Environment"; Lichtman and VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later"; Wang, "Two Affective Variables and Language Learners' Perceptions of Classroom Interaction."

³² Al Farisi et al., "Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of 'Bandung'"; Hehsan et al., "Digital Muhadathah: Framework Model Development for Digital Arabic Language Learning"; Zulhannan et al., "Enhancing Communicative Arabic Teaching: Evaluating the Al-Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik Model."

communication.³³ Meanwhile, second language acquisition theory holds that language mastery develops optimally only when learners have adequate exposure, opportunities to interact, and pedagogical support matched to their readiness.³⁴ The results show that these two perspectives do not contradict but complement each other.³⁵ The Islamic education goal of building deeper access to Islamic resources can only be realized if Arabic learning is held in a pedagogical environment that allows students to use Arabic meaningfully.

Based on these findings, this study positions students' readiness as the starting point of Arabic learning planning. Improving learning quality extends beyond methods, media, or curriculum, requiring an institutional mechanism that identifies readiness from the beginning and adjusts learning strategies to this diversity. This study thus expands Arabic pedagogy by showing that the relationship between readiness and pedagogical practice is reciprocal: readiness influences teachers' decisions, while those decisions further determine the breadth of students' opportunities to develop communicative competencies in Arabic. Future studies could explore how digital tools and broader language exposure contribute to Arabic communicative competence in similar educational contexts.³⁶

³³ Ahmed, "An Exploration of Naquib Al-Attas' Theory of Islamic Education as Ta'dib as an 'Indigenous' Educational Philosophy"; Dangor, "Islamization of Disciplines: Towards an Indigenous Educational System."

³⁴ Lichtman and VanPatten, "Was Krashen Right? Forty Years Later"; Wang, "Two Affective Variables and Language Learners' Perceptions of Classroom Interaction."

³⁵ Nana Jumhana et al., "Teachers' Understanding and Practice of the Genre-Based Approach in Arabic Instruction at Indonesian Madrasahs," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 2 (2025): 331–42, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v11i2.44666>.

³⁶ Roslizawati Saad et al., "The Use of Digital Teaching Tools to Support Arabic Speaking Skills in Secondary School: A Systematic Literature Review," *Educational Process International Journal* 17, no. 1 (2025): e2025404, <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2025.17.404>; Bilal Zakarneh and Diana Amin Mohammad Mahmoud, "Investigating the Role of Arabic

Conclusion

This study shows that pedagogical problems in Arabic learning at MAN 1 Semarang cannot be understood solely as a problem of learning methods, but result from the interaction between students' readiness, pedagogical practice, and the institutional context. Differences in educational backgrounds cause students to enter the madrasah with varying levels of readiness, which affects teachers' decisions, class interaction patterns, the dominance of grammar learning, and limited use of Arabic as a medium of communication. Readiness is thus not only an individual characteristic but a pedagogical factor that shapes how Arabic learning is implemented. This study enriches Arabic pedagogy by placing readiness as a *linking factor* between student characteristics and pedagogical practice, while showing that success depends on the integration of learning readiness, strategies, and environments that support meaningful language use.

Practically, madrasahs should consider diagnostic assessment at the start of learning to map readiness and develop more adaptive, differentiated strategies. At classroom level, teachers should expand opportunities for meaningful Arabic use without neglecting grammar mastery. Though limited to one site and not generalizable across Indonesian Islamic education, these findings support comparative and longitudinal research on how readiness shapes pedagogy and on the effectiveness of diagnostic assessment and differentiated learning for communicative competence.

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