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Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Problems in Arabic Language Learning and Teachers' Adaptive Strategies: A Case Study at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic and non-linguistic problems that students encounter in Arabic language learning and the strategies teachers use to address them at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City, North Maluku. This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design. Data were obtained from one Arabic language teacher with more than three years of teaching experience and twenty students from Grades VII, VIII, and IX, selected through purposive sampling to represent varying achievement levels and mother-tongue backgrounds (Ternate, Tidore, and Tobelo). Data were collected through eight sessions of participatory classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with the teacher (15–20 minutes) and students (10–15 minutes per session), and analysis of supporting documents such as the curriculum and samples of student work. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, with credibility established through source and method triangulation. The results show that students' problems are multidimensional, spanning linguistic aspects (limited vocabulary mastery, grammatical difficulty, and multilingual mother-tongue interference) and non-linguistic aspects (low motivation, limited learning resources, and the absence of an Arabic-speaking environment). Teachers responded through direct-method instruction, drill and repetition, audiovisual media, contextual teaching, and language games. The findings suggest that these variative, adaptive strategies substantially improved students' classroom engagement, motivation, confidence, and grammatical understanding, even without exposure to Arabic outside the classroom.

Keywords: Arabic Language Learning, Linguistic Problems, Teaching Strategies, Madrasah, Eastern Indonesia.

I. Introduction

Arabic occupies a strategic position within the Islamic education system in Indonesia, functioning not merely as the language of religious practice but as the gateway to classical Islamic scholarship. In madrasah tsanawiyah (MTs), Arabic is a compulsory curriculum subject expected to gradually build students' communicative competence. In practice, however, a persistent gap remains between the curriculum's competency targets and students' actual achievement (Izzan, 2011), a pattern that continues to be reported

across Indonesian madrasah despite more than a decade of curricular reform. Problems in Arabic language learning are not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Previous studies have documented both linguistic obstacles (phonological, morphological, and syntactic) and non-linguistic obstacles (motivation, teaching method, and facilities) that hinder Arabic mastery at the secondary level (Hermawan, 2011; Mustofa, 2011). From an applied-linguistics perspective, Krashen (1982) distinguishes between acquisition (unconscious internalization) and learning (formal instruction); most Indonesian MTs students experience only learning, without acquisition, because of minimal exposure to authentic input outside the classroom. This condition is compounded by the continuing dominance of the grammar-translation method (*qawa'id wa tarjamah*), a passive and deductive approach that Richards and Rodgers (2014) criticize as incapable of building communicative competence. More recent evidence reinforces this concern: Almelhes (2024), reviewing strategies for teaching Arabic to non-native learners, likewise reports that instructors' feedback practices, curriculum design, and use of multimedia resources remain the strongest predictors of learning outcomes, echoing a methodological gap first identified more than two decades earlier.

Much of this research has focused on Java and its surrounding regions, whereas the eastern Indonesian context—characterized by markedly different sociolinguistic conditions—remains largely unexplored. MTs Darul Ulum in Ternate City, North Maluku Province, represents a distinctive and instructive case. Students at this madrasah have no exposure to Arabic in their daily environment, their mother tongues are diverse (Ternate, Tidore, Tobelo, and others), and access to quality Arabic learning resources is severely limited. Together, these conditions create layered challenges that demand adaptive strategies from teachers, a demand made more acute in multilingual settings where technology-based solutions—such as the mobile-game-assisted instruction documented by Ghani et al. (2022) for tertiary-level Arabic learners—are not yet feasible because of infrastructural constraints.

Three research gaps motivate this study. First, empirical studies on Arabic learning problems in eastern Indonesia, particularly North Maluku, remain scarce, even though the region's linguistic diversity offers a theoretically important test case for existing models of language-learning difficulty. Second, no study has yet comprehensively linked the profile of students' problems with teachers' strategic responses within this specific context, leaving practitioners without contextually grounded guidance. Third, empirical validation of the effectiveness of Arabic teaching strategies in multilingual settings outside Java is still needed to determine whether findings from pesantren-based or Java-based research generalize elsewhere. Addressing these gaps matters beyond Ternate: madrasah in other parts of eastern Indonesia, and more broadly in multilingual, non-Arabic-speaking communities, face structurally similar conditions, so findings from this setting can inform teaching practice and policy well beyond the single research site. Accordingly, this study aims to (1) identify and classify the problems of Arabic language learning faced by students at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City, and (2) analyze the strategies teachers apply in response to these problems and their impact on students' language ability.

This gap also has policy relevance. National data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2022) show that madrasah facility and resource levels vary considerably across regions, yet teacher-training programs for Arabic instruction are still designed largely around Java-centric assumptions about student background and available infrastructure. A detailed account of how one eastern Indonesian madrasah's teacher adapts standard strategies to local conditions can therefore inform not only classroom practice at similar schools but also how teacher-training curricula and resource-allocation decisions might be adjusted for multilingual, infrastructure-limited regions more broadly. This gap also has a policy dimension. National data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2022) show persistent disparities in Arabic-learning outcomes between madrasah in Java and those in the eastern provinces, yet policy discussions of Arabic curriculum reform continue to draw mainly on evidence from Java-based or pesantren-based schools. A detailed, context-sensitive account of one eastern Indonesian madrasah—of the kind this study provides—therefore has value beyond the immediate research site: it supplies the kind of ground-level evidence that curriculum planners and teacher-training programs need if reform efforts are to be responsive to the conditions found outside Java rather than assuming those conditions mirror the national average.

II. Literature Review

2.1. Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Problems in Arabic Learning: An Integrated Framework

Two broad, analytically distinct categories organize the problems reported in Arabic-learning research: linguistic problems and non-linguistic problems (Arsyad, 2010). Linguistic problems concern the internal structure of the language itself and include phonology (Arabic sounds with no equivalent in Indonesian), morphology (tashrif of verbs and nouns), syntax (i'rab and sentence construction), and semantics (polysemy and idiomatic expressions). Non-linguistic problems, by contrast, concern the conditions surrounding learning rather than the language system itself: motivation, teaching method, media availability, teacher competence, and the learning environment (Wa Muna, 2011). This distinction matters because the two categories call for different kinds of intervention—linguistic problems are addressed primarily through instructional design (how grammar and vocabulary are taught), while non-linguistic problems are addressed through motivational, environmental, and resource-based strategies. Both categories are examined together in this study because, in practice, they interact: a poor learning environment (non-linguistic) can suppress vocabulary exposure, which in turn produces a linguistic deficit.

Hermawan (2011) adds a socio-cultural dimension that is often overlooked: students' negative perception of Arabic as an inherently 'too difficult' language, the stigma that Arabic is relevant only to religious study, and families' generally low regard for Arabic proficiency compared with other languages. From a neurolinguistic perspective, Ellis (2015) notes that the age at which second-language learning begins strongly affects ultimate attainment; MTs students, who typically begin formal Arabic instruction at age 12–13, are past the neurologically more favorable window available to younger children. Effendy (2012) further argues that a methodological problem—the continuing dominance of the passive, deductive grammar-translation method (qawa'id wa tarjamah)—constitutes the single largest obstacle to building active communicative competence. From the standpoint of information-processing theory, Nation (2001) argues that vocabulary mastery is a fundamental prerequisite for comprehension: learners typically need at least 95% vocabulary coverage of a text to understand it independently. Because Indonesian MTs students typically command only around 300–500 active Arabic words, reading comprehension becomes an especially demanding task; information-processing theory helps explain why comprehension breaks down even when isolated words have previously been taught. This is compounded by first-language (L1) transfer: Al-Khresheh (2016) identifies mother-tongue interference as one of the largest sources of error in Arabic production among non-native learners, particularly at the morphological and syntactic levels—a finding with direct relevance to Ternate's multilingual student population, whose first languages (Ternate, Tidore, Tobelo) differ structurally from both Indonesian and Arabic.

2.2. Teaching Strategies for Arabic Language Learning

Teaching strategies refer to the plans, actions, and procedures instructors use to achieve specific learning objectives (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2015). In the Arabic-teaching context, Mustofa (2011) classifies strategies into three levels: cognitive strategies (mnemonics, elaboration), metacognitive strategies (planning and monitoring one's own learning), and socio-affective strategies (cooperation, anxiety reduction). At the instructional level, Effendy (2012) recommends shifting from traditional methods toward communicative approaches that prioritize language use in authentic contexts. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), developed by Littlewood (1981) and extended by Nunan (2004), holds that the primary goal of language instruction is meaningful communicative ability. In Arabic instruction, adapting CLT must account for the diglossic complexity between Standard Arabic (fusha) and local dialects, as analyzed by Ferguson (1959) and updated by Ibrahim (2009). Technology-based media also show considerable promise: Alqahtani (2015), in a meta-analysis of 42 studies, found that multimedia-based instruction increased Arabic vocabulary retention by an average of 31% relative to conventional methods, and more recently Ghani et al. (2022) report that

mobile digital games improved tertiary-level students' engagement and vocabulary recall, though such tools presuppose a level of device and internet access not yet available in many eastern Indonesian madrasah.

The contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach developed by Johnson (2002), and adapted for Arabic instruction by Zulhannan (2014), offers a theoretical framework for connecting language material to students' lived experience. Hamid (2018), studying a modern pesantren, found that integrating audiovisual media raised students' vocabulary scores by 23% compared with conventional classes. The application of gamification—using game-design elements outside gaming contexts—examined by Deterding et al. (2011) and adapted for Arabic instruction by Rao (2019), demonstrates that competition and reward systems significantly increase foreign-language learners' intrinsic motivation. Together, these strategies (CLT, CTL, multimedia use, and gamification) form the theoretical basis against which the strategies observed at MTs Darul Ulum are interpreted in Section 4. Taken together, these four strands of strategy research—CLT, CTL, multimedia-assisted instruction, and gamification—are not mutually exclusive; contemporary Arabic-teaching scholarship increasingly treats them as complementary components that can be combined according to a classroom's specific constraints. In resource-limited settings such as MTs Darul Ulum, this suggests that the absence of one resource (e.g., reliable internet access for gamified apps) need not preclude the benefits associated with the underlying pedagogical principle (e.g., competition and reward), since low-tech equivalents such as printed word games can approximate the same motivational mechanism. This synthesis provides the theoretical lens through which the strategies identified in Section 4.2 are interpreted.

2.3. Prior Studies and the Research Gap

A number of studies have examined Arabic-learning problems in Indonesia. Munawar (2019), researching MTs in West Java, found that motivational and methodological factors were the dominant obstacles, with 74% of respondents reporting disinterest in Arabic learning because of monotonous teaching methods. Kurniawan and Sari (2021), studying a pesantren in South Sumatra, identified limited vocabulary and grammatical complexity as the primary challenges, concluding that a bi'ah lughawiyah (Arabic-speaking environment) program was effective in reducing these difficulties. At the curriculum-policy level, Assagaf (2024) shows that Indonesian higher education institutions still vary considerably in how systematically they translate needs analysis into concrete teaching strategies, suggesting that the strategy-selection challenge documented at MTs Darul Ulum is not unique to secondary education.

At the international level, Azmi et al. (2020), in a comparative study of Malaysia and Indonesia, found that learners with a Malay/Indonesian language background show error patterns distinct from those of Turkish or Iranian learners, particularly regarding gender marking (*mudzakkar*–*muannats*) and *hamzah* spelling. Alrabai's (2016) research on Arabic-learning motivation in Saudi Arabia is also relevant: he found that instrumental motivation (learning for practical purposes) dominates over integrative motivation (learning to join a community) among non-native Arabic learners, a pattern that plausibly also applies to the Indonesian context. Beyond the classroom, Ibnu Chanif, Tijani, and Basofitrah (2024) document that Indonesian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims with little functional Arabic struggle to communicate with Saudi residents even for basic needs, which illustrates the practical, real-world stakes of the vocabulary and communicative gaps this study investigates in a classroom setting.

Unlike these prior studies, which were set in Arabic-speaking environments or in communities with a strong pesantren tradition, the present study is set in a formal city school with a multilingual population and no established pesantren tradition. This contextual difference fundamentally changes the profile of problems encountered and requires a different strategic response from teachers. This study fills that gap by analyzing, in depth, how teachers respond and adapt to multilingual conditions in eastern Indonesia. In practical terms, because MTs Darul Ulum's conditions—linguistic diversity, resource scarcity, and the absence of an Arabic-speaking environment—are common to many madrasah outside Java, the strategy profile identified here offers a transferable starting point that other schools with similar constraints can adapt rather than having to develop teaching strategies from first principles.

III. Research Method

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case-study design. This choice is deliberate rather than default: the research questions ask how and why particular problems arise and how teachers respond to them in a specific, bounded setting—questions that require depth, context, and interpretation rather than the standardized, numerically comparable measurement a quantitative design would provide (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach allows the researchers to capture the nuance of classroom experience, teacher perception, and actual practice as they unfold, and to preserve the participants' own vocabulary when describing difficulty and progress. The principal limitation of this design is that findings are not statistically generalizable beyond the case; this study addresses that limitation through methodological transparency and source/method triangulation (Section 3.4) so that readers can judge the transferability of the findings to comparable settings themselves, rather than assuming statistical generalization. This design choice also shapes how the findings should be read: because the study privileges depth over breadth, the problem and strategy profiles reported in Section 4 are best understood as a detailed, well-triangulated account of one school's experience rather than as population-level estimates. Readers in other madrasah are encouraged to treat the findings as analytically generalizable—that is, useful for recognizing similar patterns and adapting similar strategies—rather than statistically generalizable to all Indonesian madrasah.

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City, North Maluku Province, during the 2026 academic year. Participants were selected purposively against explicit criteria rather than convenience. The teacher participant ($n=1$) was selected because she is the sole Arabic language teacher at the school and has a minimum of three years' teaching experience at this specific site, giving her sustained, first-hand familiarity with the students' developmental trajectory. Student participants ($n=20$, drawn from Grades VII, VIII, and IX) were selected to maximize variation on two dimensions identified in advance as theoretically relevant: (1) Arabic achievement level, based on the teacher's ongoing classroom assessment (high, medium, and low performers were each represented), and (2) mother-tongue background, so that speakers of the school's three most common first languages—Ternate, Tidore, and Tobelo—were all included. This maximum-variation strategy was chosen so that the resulting problem profile would reflect the school's actual linguistic heterogeneity rather than only its highest- or lowest-performing students.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, participatory observation was conducted across eight learning sessions using a structured observation guide covering three domains: the teaching method used, the classroom interaction pattern, and students' verbal and non-verbal responses; field notes were written immediately after each session to reduce recall bias. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with the teacher (15–20 minutes) and with students (10–15 minutes per session), guided by an interview protocol whose open-ended questions were organized around the study's two objectives—identifying problems and identifying strategies—so that every interview, regardless of participant, could be coded against the same two-part framework. Third, documentary analysis covered supporting instructional materials, including the semester syllabus, lesson plans, and samples of students' written Arabic work, which were examined to corroborate or qualify the observation and interview findings. The three data types recorded for analysis were therefore: interview transcripts, observational field notes, and document-analysis notes.

The interview guide itself comprised roughly ten core open-ended questions for the teacher (covering perceived student difficulties, strategies used, and perceived impact) and a shorter, simplified set of five to six questions for students (covering perceived difficulty, enjoyment, and confidence), phrased in accessible Indonesian to avoid language-related response bias when discussing a subject students may already find intimidating. Follow-up probes were used flexibly within each interview to pursue unexpected but relevant detail, consistent with the semi-structured format. Observation focused on naturally occurring classroom activity rather than staged demonstrations, so that the strategies described in Section 4.2 reflect ordinary teaching practice.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising three concurrent activities: (1) data condensation—open-coding the interview transcripts and field notes, then grouping codes into the two a priori categories of problem (linguistic/non-linguistic) and strategy type; (2) data display—organizing the condensed codes into narrative summaries and the matrix-style tables presented in Section 4 to make patterns across participants visible; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification—interpreting the meaning of the condensed and displayed data and checking that interpretation against the raw transcripts. Credibility was established through source triangulation (comparing accounts from the teacher, students, and documents) and technique triangulation (comparing observation, interview, and documentary evidence); where the three sources converged, a finding was treated as well supported, and where they diverged, the divergence itself is reported in Section 4 rather than resolved by selective omission.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Problems of Arabic Language Learning at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City

Based on observation and interviews with the teacher and students at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City, the study identified problems that are multidimensional in nature and that affect the Arabic learning process. These problems are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Problems of Arabic Language Learning at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City

No	Problem	Research Finding
1	Limited Vocabulary Mastery (Mufradat)	Students struggle to understand and remember Arabic vocabulary; many are unable to grasp the meaning of basic words that appear in the textbook.
2	Grammatical Difficulty (Nahwu–Sharaf)	Students find the rules of nahwu and sharaf difficult to understand; the complexity of Arabic's inflectional system differs substantially from Indonesian sentence structure.
3	Low Learning Motivation	Some students perceive Arabic as a difficult subject with limited relevance to their daily lives.
4	Limited Learning Resources	Instructional media and teaching materials remain very limited; the school library has few up-to-date Arabic references.
5	Mother-Tongue Interference	The diversity of students' mother tongues (Ternate, Tidore, Tobelo) produces phonological and morphological interference that hinders Arabic production.

a. Limited Vocabulary Mastery (Mufradat)

According to the interviews, limited vocabulary is the primary obstacle students face in learning Arabic. Many students are unable to grasp the meaning of vocabulary in the learning material, which makes it difficult for them to read texts or answer the teacher's questions.

- Researcher : *"What difficulty do students most often experience in learning Arabic?"*
Teacher : *"The difficulty I encounter most often is students' limited vocabulary mastery. Many students do not yet understand the meaning of basic words, which makes it hard for them to follow the lesson."*
Student : *"I often forget the meaning of vocabulary I have already studied. When there is a new word, I have to ask the teacher again."*

This finding aligns with Nation (2001), who argues that a minimum of 95% vocabulary coverage is required to comprehend a text independently. Kurniawan and Sari's (2021) study in a South Sumatran pesantren likewise found limited vocabulary to be a primary obstacle, although in their context a bi'ah lughawiyah program helped offset the deficit. Unlike a pesantren setting, students at MTs Darul Ulum have no supportive Arabic-speaking environment, so vocabulary exposure occurs almost entirely within the classroom. Al-Seghayer (2014) argues that frequency of exposure is a decisive factor in consolidating vocabulary into long-term memory; the near-total absence of out-of-class exposure provides a theoretical explanation for the high rate of vocabulary forgetting observed among students in this study.

b. Grammatical Difficulty (Nahwu–Sharaf)

Beyond vocabulary limitations, students also struggle to understand Arabic grammar, particularly nahwu and sharaf. This material is considered fairly complex because it involves rules that differ substantially from Indonesian sentence structure.

- Student : *"I often get confused when constructing a sentence because I have to pay attention to certain rules."*
Teacher : *"Students usually have difficulty with nahwu and sharaf material because it requires deeper understanding rather than simple memorization of vocabulary."*

This finding parallels Azmi et al. (2020), who found that Arabic learners with a Malay/Indonesian background consistently make errors in gender marking (mudzakkar–muannats) and the i'rab case system. Unlike Indonesian, which has no case inflection, Arabic has a case-marking system (rafa', nashab, jarr) that is typologically unfamiliar to speakers of Austronesian languages. Within a Universal Grammar framework, learners must undertake parameter resetting, a process that requires time and intensive practice. Effendy (2012) recommends presenting grammatical rules inductively, through authentic examples, before formal rule statement, rather than following the traditional deductive sequence.

c. Low Learning Motivation

Observation showed that some students remained relatively passive during Arabic lessons. Several students appeared disengaged when the teacher posed questions or during class discussion.

- Student : *"Arabic is quite difficult because there is so much vocabulary to memorize."*
Teacher : *"Some students still lack confidence and enthusiasm when learning Arabic."*

According to Hermawan (2011), motivation plays a critical role in successful language learning. This finding is consistent with Alrabai (2016), who identifies low motivation among non-native Arabic learners as often rooted in foreign language anxiety, a construct Horwitz et al. (1986) show to be distinct from general anxiety. Munawar (2019) found a similar pattern in West Java, where 74% of respondents reported disinterest in Arabic because of monotonous teaching methods. Importantly, this study surfaces an additional dimension: within Ternate's multilingual community, a social stigma persists that Arabic proficiency is relevant mainly to those pursuing religious scholarship, which indirectly suppresses many students' intrinsic motivation.

d. Limited Learning Resources

The teacher acknowledged that limited instructional media constitutes a further obstacle. The school library holds few up-to-date Arabic references, and internet access for locating digital learning resources is not evenly available among students. This places MTs Darul Ulum in a more constrained position than madrasah in larger Javanese cities, consistent with the facility comparisons reported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2022). This finding is consistent with Tomlinson's (2012) critique that material quality is among the strongest predictors of foreign-language learning success.

e. Mother-Tongue Interference in a Multilingual Setting

As Table 1 indicates, students' mother tongues are not uniform: Ternate, Tidore, and Tobelo are all represented in the classroom, alongside Indonesian as the language of instruction outside Arabic lessons. Consistent with Al-Khresheh's (2016) account of first-language transfer, observation and interview data suggest that this diversity compounds rather than simplifies the interference problem: because the three local languages differ from one another as well as from Arabic, the teacher cannot rely on a single, shared L1 reference point when explaining pronunciation or sentence order, unlike in more linguistically homogeneous classrooms elsewhere in Indonesia. In practice, interference is most visible in students' pronunciation of Arabic consonants absent from their local languages and in word-order errors when they map Arabic syntax onto the more analytic structures of their mother tongues. Because this interference operates alongside the absence of an Arabic-speaking environment (bi'ah lughawiyah) outside the classroom, students receive no informal opportunity to notice and self-correct these errors between lessons, so correction depends almost entirely on the teacher's in-class feedback—a resource-intensive requirement given a single teacher and a linguistically heterogeneous class.

4.2. Teacher Strategies for Addressing Problems in Arabic Language Learning

Based on interviews and observation, the teacher applied several teaching strategies to address the various obstacles students faced, summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Teacher Strategies for Addressing Problems in Arabic Language Learning

No	Strategy	Implementation
1	Direct Method	The teacher consistently uses simple Arabic during classroom instruction; the target language serves as the primary medium of communication, with brief Indonesian clarification reserved for genuinely unfamiliar concepts.
2	Drill and Repetition	The teacher periodically reviews vocabulary and sentence patterns at the start of each session; choral drilling is used to train pronunciation.
3	Audiovisual Media	The teacher uses pictures, word cards, and Arabic-language video clips to present vocabulary and model authentic language use.
4	Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL)	Material is linked to students' everyday experience; the teacher creates realistic communicative situations in class as language-use practice.
5	Language Games	The teacher uses educational games such as word guessing, matching cards, and vocabulary competitions to increase motivation and participation.

a. Use of the Direct Method

One strategy the teacher uses is the direct method. The teacher works to accustom students to hearing and using simple Arabic throughout the learning process.

Teacher: *"I try to use simple Arabic in class so students become accustomed to hearing and understanding the vocabulary being used."*

This application of the direct method is consistent with Krashen's (1982) comprehensible-input principle—presenting the target language at the $i+1$ level (slightly above students' current ability) so that it remains understandable in context. Concretely, this takes the form of the teacher giving classroom instructions (“open your books,” “repeat after me,” “work with a partner”) in simple Arabic accompanied by gesture, and only switching to Indonesian to clarify a genuinely unfamiliar grammatical concept once comprehension checks show students cannot infer the meaning from context. Unlike direct-method implementation in large-city schools staffed by highly fluent teachers, at MTs Darul Ulum the teacher adapts the method by combining it with brief Indonesian explanations for genuinely unfamiliar concepts. Richards and Rodgers (2014) term this kind of adaptation pragmatic eclecticism: selecting techniques according to the real needs of the context rather than adhering rigidly to a single methodological school.

b. Drill and Repetition

The teacher also applies repeated drilling to reinforce students' understanding of Arabic vocabulary and sentence patterns.

Teacher: *“Vocabulary that has already been studied is always reviewed again in the next session so students do not easily forget it.”*

The use of drill and repetition has a strong theoretical basis in behaviorist theories of language learning (Skinner, 1957), although this approach has since been critiqued by cognitive and communicative schools of thought. In the Indonesian Arabic-teaching context, Mustofa (2011) maintains the relevance of structured drilling, particularly for mastering morphology and the inflectional system. Research by Abou-Rawash and Al-Bakkar (2022) in Jordan shows that spaced repetition—reviewing vocabulary at progressively longer intervals—empirically improves long-term retention compared with massed practice. This finding offers a scientific justification for the teacher's practice of reviewing vocabulary at the start of every session.

c. Use of Audiovisual Media

Audiovisual media are used as a means of increasing students' interest in learning.

Teacher: *“Sometimes I use videos or pictures so students are more interested in following the lesson.”*

Student: *“When there is a video or picture, it is easier for me to understand the material the teacher is explaining.”*

The use of audiovisual media is consistent with Paivio's (1986) dual coding theory, which explains that information presented simultaneously in verbal and visual form is processed through two distinct cognitive channels, strengthening encoding and retrieval. Hamid (2018) found a 23% increase in vocabulary scores through audiovisual media integration in a modern pesantren. Further, Alqahtani's (2015) meta-analysis of 42 studies reports an average effect size of $d = 0.73$ for multimedia-based Arabic vocabulary instruction, indicating a substantial impact. Practical constraints such as limited projector availability and internet connectivity at MTs Darul Ulum do restrict how intensively this medium can be used, but printed pictures and word cards, as low-tech alternatives, have proven effective in practice.

d. Language Games

Language games are used to create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere and to reduce language anxiety.

Teacher: *“Occasionally I use word games or simple quizzes to make students more enthusiastic about learning Arabic.”*

The use of language games as a teaching strategy connects to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory, in which optimal engagement occurs when challenge is balanced with ability. Rao (2019), studying gamification in Arabic instruction, found that competition, reward, and immediate feedback significantly increase intrinsic motivation. Deterding et al. (2011) argue that gamification is not mere entertainment but a psychological mechanism that engages the dopamine reward pathway to reinforce learning behavior. In this study, the language games served a dual function: providing spaced practice that did not feel imposed, while simultaneously lowering language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

4.3. Impact of Teaching Strategies on Students

Implementing these teaching strategies produced a positive impact on students' learning process, summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Impact of Teaching Strategies on Students

No	Impact	Research Finding
1	Improved Vocabulary Mastery	Students recall vocabulary more easily; retention of mufradat improved through drilling and visual media.
2	Increased Classroom Engagement	Students ask and answer questions more actively; participation in discussion increased during the application of varied teaching strategies.
3	Increased Motivation	Students showed greater enthusiasm for learning; perception of Arabic as an enjoyable subject increased gradually.
4	Increased Confidence	Students began to use simple Arabic in classroom conversation, including when answering the teacher's questions.
5	Improved Grammatical Understanding	Understanding of basic nahwu concepts improved; students began constructing simple, grammatical sentences with teacher guidance.

Student: *"It has become easier for me to understand the lesson, and I am braver about answering questions."*

Teacher: *"I see students being more active now than before. They are braver about asking questions and trying to use Arabic."*

These positive impacts align with findings from prior research across various contexts. Munawar (2019) reported a significant increase in motivation when teachers shifted from lecture-based to more varied methods. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (2022) similarly recorded a positive correlation between the use of varied instructional media and improved Arabic examination results in madrasah nationally. What distinguishes this study, however, is Ternate's unique multilingual context: students' growing confidence in using Arabic occurred despite the absence of a supportive Arabic-speaking environment (bi'ah lughawiyah) outside the classroom, indicating that the teacher's in-class adaptive strategies were able to substitute, at least partially, for the lack of out-of-class exposure.

This finding reinforces Effendy's (2012) argument that varied, communicative teaching strategies improve the effectiveness of Arabic instruction and foster a more active, enjoyable learning atmosphere. From the standpoint of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the strategies the teacher applied successfully met learners' three basic psychological needs: autonomy (through games and contextual learning), competence (through drilling that produced a sense of mastery), and relatedness (through group activity). Meeting these three needs plausibly explains the increase in intrinsic motivation observed in this study, and it also clarifies the mechanism—not just the fact—by which each strategy in Table 2 produced the corresponding impact in Table 3: direct method and CTL primarily built autonomy and relatedness, drill and repetition primarily built competence, and language games contributed to all three needs simultaneously.

It is also worth noting where the evidence in this study is strongest and where it is more tentative. The link between drill-and-repetition and improved vocabulary retention (Table 3, item 1) is corroborated across all three data sources—observation, teacher interview, and student interview—and is therefore treated as a well-supported finding. The link between language games and reduced language anxiety, by contrast, rests mainly on the teacher's and students' self-reports rather than on a systematic anxiety measure, so it is reported here as a plausible, theory-consistent pattern rather than a firmly established causal claim. Distinguishing these levels of evidentiary strength is intended to help other madrasah judge which parts of the strategy profile they can adopt with high confidence and which merit further local verification before wide adoption. This kind of graded confidence reporting is, in the authors' view, more useful to practitioners than a uniformly confident narrative, because it signals explicitly where further classroom-based verification would be most valuable before a strategy is scaled up to a whole department or school.

V. Conclusion

This study achieved both of its stated objectives. First, the problems of Arabic language learning at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City, are multidimensional, spanning linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. Linguistic problems include limited vocabulary mastery, difficulty understanding Arabic grammar (*nahwu-sharaf*), and interference from students' diverse mother tongues in a multilingual Ternate context. Non-linguistic problems include low learning motivation, limited learning resources, and minimal Arabic exposure outside the classroom. This problem profile shares similarities with prior research conducted in Java and Sumatra, but with a markedly higher intensity on facility limitations and the absence of a *bi'ah lughawiyyah*. Second, Arabic teachers at MTs Darul Ulum, Ternate City, have implemented adaptive teaching strategies encompassing the direct method, drill and repetition, audiovisual media, contextual learning, and language games. Based on observation and interview results, these strategies produced verifiable positive impacts: increased student engagement, greater learning motivation, improved confidence in using Arabic, and gradually improved grammatical understanding.

The practical implications of this study point to the importance of varied, adaptive teaching strategies suited to students' characteristics and their learning environment, particularly in eastern Indonesia's distinctive sociolinguistic conditions. For other madrasah facing comparable constraints—linguistic diversity among students, limited instructional resources, and no Arabic-speaking environment outside school—the strategy combination identified here offers a practical, low-cost starting point: teachers can begin with direct-method instruction and spaced drilling, which require no special equipment, before layering in audiovisual media and games as resources allow. School leaders and curriculum developers can use the problem profile in Table 1 as a diagnostic checklist when designing teacher training for similarly multilingual, resource-constrained settings. Future research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of Arabic teaching strategies through classroom action research or controlled experimental designs, which would yield stronger causal evidence regarding the effectiveness of these strategies than the descriptive qualitative evidence presented here; comparative multi-site studies across several eastern Indonesian madrasah would further test how far these findings generalize beyond the single case examined in this study.

This study has limitations that should guide how its findings are used. As a single-site descriptive qualitative study, it does not permit statistical generalization to all madrasah in eastern Indonesia, and the sample of twenty students and one teacher, while sufficient for the maximum-variation purposive sampling strategy adopted, cannot capture every possible variation in ability level or linguistic background found in larger schools. In addition, because data collection relied on observation across eight sessions together with interviews and document analysis, the findings describe patterns observed during that period and may not capture longer-term changes in student motivation or achievement. Readers should therefore treat the problem and strategy profiles reported here as a rich, contextually grounded account that is well suited to analytic generalization—informing hypotheses and practice in similar settings—rather than as a population estimate.

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