Internal and External Barriers to Arabic Reading Mastery: An Empirical Study in an Indonesian Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the types of difficulties students face in Arabic reading (qirāʾah) skills and to identify the internal and external factors influencing these challenges, including the strategies employed by teachers to address them. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and documentation. The research subjects were seventh-grade students at MTs Sirajul Huda Tigabinanga Karo. The findings reveal that students struggle with basic literacy skills such as hijaiyah letter recognition, low motivation, and negative perceptions of Arabic. External factors such as limited teacher availability, inadequate learning support, and scarce instructional materials further exacerbate these difficulties. Nevertheless, teachers have adopted contextual strategies such as daily vocabulary routines and the integration of Islamic values to enhance students' qirāʾah abilities. This study recommends context-based interventions and institutional support to promote more effective reading instruction in resource-constrained madrasah settings.

Keywords: *Reading Skills, Arabic Language, Learning Difficulties, Madrasah Instruction, Teacher Strategies*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan bentuk-bentuk kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa dalam keterampilan membaca (*qirāʾah*) bahasa Arab serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor internal dan eksternal yang

memengaruhinya, termasuk strategi yang diterapkan oleh guru untuk mengatasinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Subjek penelitian adalah siswa kelas VIII MTs Sirajul Huda Tigabinanga Karo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan membaca yang dialami siswa meliputi rendahnya penguasaan huruf hijaiyah, motivasi belajar yang lemah, serta persepsi negatif terhadap bahasa Arab. Faktor eksternal seperti keterbatasan guru, minimnya dukungan lingkungan belajar, dan sarana pembelajaran yang terbatas turut memperburuk kondisi tersebut. Meski demikian, guru telah menerapkan strategi kontekstual seperti pembiasaan kosakata harian dan integrasi nilai keislaman untuk meningkatkan kemampuan *qirāʾah* siswa. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan perlunya intervensi berbasis konteks dan dukungan institusional untuk mengembangkan pembelajaran membaca yang lebih efektif di madrasah dengan keterbatasan sumber daya.

Kata Kunci: *Keterampilan Membaca, Bahasa Arab, Kesulitan Belajar, Pembelajaran Madrasah, Strategi Guru*

Introduction

Although Arabic is a core subject in Islamic educational institutions, many Indonesian madrasah students continue to struggle with mastering the skill of reading Arabic texts effectively.[1] This problem is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where disparities in students' linguistic readiness and limited educational resources exacerbate the situation. A clear example can be observed at MTs Sirajul Huda Tigabinanga Karo, a state Islamic junior high school located in a remote area of North Sumatra. Field observations and interviews revealed that most eighth-grade students in this school face serious difficulties in reading basic Arabic texts fluently and accurately. These difficulties are not merely technical, such as mispronunciations and the inability to recognize diacritical marks, but also affective, marked by low learning motivation and even anxiety when confronted with Arabic script.

This phenomenon reflects a broader pedagogical issue and cannot be dismissed as an isolated case. Inability to read Arabic

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[1] Albantani, A. M., & Madkur, A. (2019). Teaching Arabic in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 in Indonesia: Challenges and opportunities. *ASEAN Journal of Community Engagement*, *3*(2). https://doi.org/10.7454/ajce.v3i2.1063

competently directly affects the overall process of language acquisition,[2] and hinders students' access to primary sources of Islamic teachings such as the Qur'an and Hadith.[3] Weak mastery of the *hijaiyah* letters and students' negative perceptions toward Arabic indicate that the challenges they face are rooted not only in internal factors but are also shaped by unsupportive external conditions. This complexity raises questions about the effectiveness of the instructional approaches currently employed and underscores the need for empirical research that not only identifies reading difficulties but also explores the contextual factors behind them. Understanding and addressing this issue is therefore crucial for improving the quality of Arabic language instruction in madrasahs, particularly those operating in resource-constrained environments.

In the context of Arabic language learning, reading skills (*qirāʾah*) occupy a highly strategic position as the primary gateway to understanding Arabic texts, whether religious or academic.[4] Mastery of *qirāʾah* involves not only the ability to accurately pronounce letters and diacritical marks but also the capacity to comprehend the content of the text holistically. This skill is especially critical in Islamic educational settings, where students are expected to access original texts from the Qur'an, Hadith, and other classical sources. Without adequate reading proficiency, students will struggle to fully interpret Islamic teachings, which ultimately affects the depth and quality of their religious understanding.[5]

Nevertheless, the reality in the field shows that madrasah students' reading proficiency remains far from ideal. Many students lack

[2] Divekar, R. R., Drozdal, J., S., Zhou, Y., Su, H., Chen, Y., Zhu, H., Hendler, J. A., & Braasch, J. (2022). Foreign language acquisition via artificial intelligence and extended reality: design and evaluation. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *35*(9), 2332–2360. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1879162

[3] Hamsira M. Harad, & Benjier H. Arriola. (2022). Implementation of Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE). *THE American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (THE AJHSSR)* , *5*(3), 47–57.

[4] Dewi, I., Ahmad Nurcholis, Izzatul Laila, Juan Acevedo, & Moumen El-Sayed. (2025). Curiosity-Driven Learning in Arabic: A Case Study on the "Inquiring Minds Want to Know" Approach. *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, *6*(1), 42–64. https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v6i1.17881

[5] Akmaliyah, A., Hudzaifah, Y., Ulfah, N., & Pamungkas, M. I. (2021). Child-Friendly Teaching Approach for Arabic Language in Indonesian Islamic Boarding School. *International Journal of Language Education*, 501–514. https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v5i1.15297

a strong foundation in recognizing *hijaiyah* letters and basic reading patterns, rendering the act of reading an intimidating experience that diminishes their motivation to learn.[6] Weak *qirāʾah* mastery is closely linked to the scarcity of structured practice, limited variety in teaching approaches, and insufficient curricular time allocated to strengthening reading skills. As a result, students tend to rely on rote memorization without comprehension, or even avoid interacting with Arabic texts altogether. This situation demonstrates that *qirāʾah* problems cannot simply be reduced to individual shortcomings but should be viewed as symptoms of an instructional system that has yet to fully address the needs and characteristics of its learners.[7]

A number of studies emphasize that reading difficulties are not merely mechanical but are rooted in phonological, linguistic, and cognitive foundations. Milankov et al. (2021) demonstrated that phonological awareness is a crucial prerequisite in acquiring reading skills, even in transparent orthographies; deficits in this area hinder the decoding process and create a chain of obstacles for literacy development.[8] Li et al. (2021) likewise found that second-language learners who struggle with reading comprehension exhibit limitations in vocabulary, oral comprehension, and both morphological and syntactic awareness. These internal barriers form a complex pattern of reading difficulties, reinforcing the understanding that reading ability is influenced by the interaction of phonological, lexical, and higher-order processing factors.[9] Complementing these findings, Taha et al. (2022) revealed that readers with reading difficulties display weaknesses in learning new words through the fast-mapping mechanism, indicating

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[6] Susiawati, I., & Fanirin, Moch. H. (2020). ARABIC LEARNING AT MADRASAH ALIYAH BASED ON THE 2013 CURRICULUM. *Arabiyat : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Dan Kebahasaaraban*, *7*(2), 251–263. https://doi.org/10.15408/a.v7i2.17444

[7] Muchsinul Khuluq, Moh. Ainin, Abdul Wahab Rosyidi, & Nurul Imamah. (2025). The Development of Reading Skill Teaching Materials Based on Prezi Artificial Intelligence. *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab*, *9*(1), 327–346.

[8] Milankov, V., Golubović, S., Krstić, T., & Golubović, Š. (2021). Phonological Awareness as the Foundation of Reading Acquisition in Students Reading in Transparent Orthography. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(10), 5440. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18105440

[9] Li, M., Geva, E., D'Angelo, N., Koh, P. W., Chen, X., & Gottardo, A. (2021). Exploring sources of poor reading comprehension in English language learners. *Annals of Dyslexia*, *71*(2), 299–321. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-021-00214-4

weak visual–phonological associations and reduced verbal efficiency in building lexical representations.[10]

A study focusing specifically on the Arabic language was conducted by Karroum et al. (2024), who found that early mastery of phonological and phonemic awareness significantly affects Arabic reading skills. Children who are unable to represent and manipulate speech sounds tend to experience difficulty in recognizing letters, words, and sentence structures, whereas students with strong phonological foundations demonstrate better reading fluency.[11] Collectively, these four studies underscore that internal factors, such as phonological awareness, lexical competence, and verbal efficiency, are critical determinants in reading acquisition. However, previous research has largely focused on cognitive-linguistic dimensions without considering contextual factors such as student motivation, perceptions, and teachers' adaptive strategies in resource-constrained madrasah settings, which constitutes the primary area of novelty in this study.

This research offers novelty in two key aspects. First, in terms of approach, it integrates the analysis of internal factors (motivation, perception, and foundational skills) and external factors (social environment, instructional conditions, and availability of learning media) into a single, coherent analytical framework. Second, in terms of context, the study's focus on rural madrasahs with limited resources provides an authentic portrait that is often underrepresented in dominant academic discourse. Consequently, this research not only broadens understanding of *qirāʾah* learning in madrasahs but also contributes to the development of pedagogical strategies that are responsive to the contextual challenges of Arabic language education in Indonesia.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, selected for its capacity to depict phenomena in a deep and contextual manner, particularly students' learning experiences, classroom dynamics, and

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[10] Taha, H., Sawaed, S., & Jabareen-Taha, S. (2022). Are Reading Difficulties Associated With Poor Verbal Learning Skills? Evidence From the Fast-Mapping Paradigm. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(3), 431–436. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1203.02

[11] Karroum, A., Ouazene, Z., & Gougil, R. (2024). *Relationship Between Arabic Reading Skills and Phonological Awareness in the First Level of Primary School* (pp. 243–252). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68653-5_24

teachers' responses to instructional challenges. This approach positions the researcher as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation, enabling a holistic understanding of the social realities under investigation. Qualitative descriptive methodology and the role of the researcher as the main instrument are widely discussed in qualitative research literature as essential for capturing the nuance, meaning, and complexity of participants' experiences that cannot be fully conveyed through quantitative methods alone.[12]

The study was conducted at MTs Sirajul Huda Tigabinanga Karo, a madrasah characterized by limited resources and infrastructure, making its local context crucial for understanding the *qirāʾah* difficulties faced by students. The research subjects comprised eighth-grade students, the Arabic language teacher, the principal, and classroom teachers directly involved in the instructional process. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals presumed to possess rich knowledge and experience relevant to the phenomenon under study, ensuring that the collected data were information-rich and in-depth. This sampling approach aligns with the objectives of qualitative research, which prioritizes depth of understanding over statistical representativeness.[13]

Data were collected through three primary techniques: participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to record classroom interactions and students' responses to Arabic texts; interviews explored teachers' practices, instructional challenges, and students' learning experiences; while documentation included lesson plans, syllabi, learning assessments, and visual records of classroom activities as supporting data. The use of these combined techniques represents methodological triangulation, which systematically enhances both validity and depth of understanding through cross-source and cross-

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[12] John W. Creswell, & Cheryl N. Poth. (2023). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

[13] Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, *42*(5), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

method comparisons, thereby ensuring the consistency and credibility of the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which comprises three core stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.[14] During the reduction phase, raw data were filtered to focus on information relevant to the research questions. Data were then displayed in descriptive narrative form to clarify emerging patterns in the field. Finally, conclusions were drawn incrementally and continuously verified throughout the data collection and analysis process. The validity of the findings was further reinforced through the application of both source triangulation and method triangulation, aimed at testing the consistency of information obtained from multiple methods and participants.

Results and Discussion

Classroom observations conducted in the eighth grade of MTs Sirajul Huda Tigabinanga Karo revealed that the majority of students experienced significant difficulties in Arabic reading (*qirāʾah*). These difficulties were evident in students' passive behavior during the learning process. When the teacher asked them to read a text, only a small number of students dared to try, while the majority were reluctant to engage actively. Some appeared confused when confronted with Arabic texts, and a few did not bring their textbooks to class. The classroom atmosphere tended to be monotonous, with minimal two-way interaction, which led to lessons being conducted without enthusiasm. Teachers frequently had to repeat basic instructions, such as letter recognition or diacritical pronunciation, which ideally should have been mastered at this grade level.

Reading difficulties were reflected not only in verbal participation but also in students' responses to the lesson content. During question-and-answer sessions, students often failed to answer even simple questions related to the text. Observations also noted that many students did not review the material independently at home and relied entirely on the teacher's explanations in class. When assigned reading tasks, most students hesitated, read slowly, or mispronounced letters,

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[14] Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, & Johnny Saldaña. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

indicating that their reading skills had not yet reached a functional level that would allow them to comprehend texts independently. Furthermore, their limited engagement in reading activities negatively affected the overall classroom dynamics.[15]

The observation findings were reinforced by interviews with several students, who shared their personal experiences in learning *qirāʾah*. One student stated, "When I see Arabic letters, I immediately feel confused. They all look the same. It's hard to read and I forget quickly." This statement reflects a cognitive barrier in distinguishing letters and remembering reading patterns. Another student added, "Sometimes I want to study, but I don't know where to start. If the teacher doesn't explain again, I can't understand." These remarks illustrate students' high dependency on teacher guidance and their very low level of autonomous learning. Both quotations reflect the general condition of the class, in which reading difficulties arise from a lack of foundational readiness and an absence of effective learning strategies.

Internal Factors

Field findings indicate that the most prominent internal factor contributing to reading difficulties among eighth-grade students at MTs Sirajul Huda is low learning motivation. Based on classroom observations and interviews, many students demonstrated a lack of interest in Arabic lessons, particularly in *qirāʾah* activities. They attended classes merely to fulfill curricular requirements rather than from an intrinsic drive to understand the material. This lack of curiosity and emotional connection with the learning content caused reading activities to feel like a burdensome obligation rather than a meaningful need, directly affecting their cognitive and affective engagement in the learning process.

In addition to low motivation, negative perceptions of Arabic emerged as a significant barrier in the learning process. Interviews

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[15] Tamam Syaifuddin, Luthfiyah Nurlaela, & Sukma Perdana P. (2021). Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Model to Students Improve Learning Outcome at Senior High School of Model Terpadu Bojonegoro. *IJORER : International Journal of Recent Educational Research*, *2*(5), 528–535. https://doi.org/10.46245/ijorer.v2i5.143

revealed that some students perceived Arabic as a complicated subject that was difficult to master. They viewed it as a foreign language far removed from their daily lives and requiring extensive memorization, particularly in recognizing letter shapes and diacritical marks. Consequently, some students felt overwhelmed even before the lesson began. Fear of making mistakes and anxiety when encountering Arabic script created psychological barriers that limited their active participation and hindered the gradual development of reading proficiency.

Another internal factor was weak foundational mastery, especially in correctly recognizing and pronouncing *hijaiyah* letters. Field data indicated that many students had not fully mastered letters and diacritical marks, making it difficult for them to read words fluently, let alone comprehend entire texts. This deficiency affected not only the technical aspect of reading but also impeded their ability to understand the meaning of the texts. Such unpreparedness suggests that prior learning experiences had not successfully built a solid foundation for Arabic literacy. In the long term, this weakness can trigger recurring frustration whenever students encounter new texts and reduce their confidence in using the Arabic language.

External Factors

In addition to internal factors, the development of reading skills at MTs Sirajul Huda is also influenced by a range of external factors that significantly shape the students' learning environment. One major aspect is the highly diverse social background of the students. Observations and interviews revealed that students come from varied family backgrounds, both in terms of economic conditions and the level of parental support for education. Some students are boarding students (*santri mukim*) who live within the madrasah environment, while others are day students (*non-mukim*) who commute from home. This difference affects their exposure to Arabic language activities outside the classroom. Non-boarding students tend to have fewer opportunities to engage in religious activities or supplemental language practice after school hours, resulting in limited reading practice intensity.

Another prominent external factor is the shortage of teaching staff. In practice, the number of Arabic teachers is disproportionately low

compared to the number of classes that must be handled. Consequently, one teacher often has to teach multiple classes simultaneously, which greatly reduces the possibility of individualized support for students who experience difficulties. Moreover, the time allocated in the curriculum for reading skills is limited, causing lessons to be rushed and lacking depth. This situation deprives students of sufficient opportunities to receive meaningful feedback and adequate practice time.

Infrastructure limitations also exacerbate the situation. Documentation revealed that the available Arabic language learning media are extremely limited. Few textbooks or supporting reading materials are systematically provided in the madrasah. Teachers have also not yet utilized digital media or interactive technologies as alternative learning tools. As a result, the learning process remains monotonous, relying heavily on lecture and rote memorization methods. This lack of media variety makes it difficult for students to develop an interest in reading or to practice independently. Collectively, these external factors create a learning ecosystem that is not fully supportive of optimal *qirāʾah* skill development.

Teacher Strategies

Amid these challenges in *qirāʾah* instruction, the Arabic teacher at MTs Sirajul Huda has implemented several strategies to help students overcome their reading difficulties. Based on observations and interviews, the efforts are adaptive and context-sensitive, taking into account students' psychological conditions and their initial skill levels. One key strategy is daily vocabulary familiarization (*mufradāt*), in which students are asked to memorize and pronounce one new Arabic word each day before the lesson begins. This activity is carried out consistently to foster a sense of familiarity with the Arabic language and gradually expand students' vocabulary.

In addition, the teacher integrates Islamic values into the reading lessons, linking the pronunciation of short Qur'anic verses, hadith excerpts, or Arabic proverbs with students' daily religious practices. For instance, after the *ẓuhr* prayer, students are asked to recite short Arabic expressions as an exercise in reading and speaking. This strategy not only improves reading skills but also reinforces the relevance of Arabic to the students' spiritual lives. By connecting *qirāʾah* learning to activities

embedded in their daily routines, students become more motivated and perceive Arabic as more than just a school subject, it becomes a part of their identity and worship.

The madrasah also provides institutional support for teachers' initiatives by allowing creative flexibility in developing instructional methods. Interviews with the principal indicated that the school is open to teachers' innovations and encourages additional programs aimed at strengthening students' reading skills. While resource limitations remain a challenge, collaboration between teachers and school management in seeking alternative solutions, such as small project-based learning and informal training sessions outside the classroom, demonstrates a strong commitment to overcoming existing barriers. These efforts, although modest, highlight the crucial role of responsive and adaptive teaching practices in fostering a more conducive learning environment for the development of students' *qirāʾah* skills.

Discussion

Field findings reveal that reading (*qirāʾah*) difficulties among eighth-grade students at MTs Sirajul Huda are caused by a combination of internal and external factors that interact with one another. This aligns with international literature indicating that learning motivation strongly influences students' interest in studying Arabic.[16] Low intrinsic motivation and limited affective drive often lead students to adopt a passive stance, engaging in learning only under external compulsion.[17]

Internal factors, such as negative perceptions of Arabic and initial inability to recognize *hijaiyah* letters, indicate that students face barriers at the most fundamental phonological and orthographic levels. The inability to recognize Arabic letters and distinguish the sounds they represent reflects weak phonological awareness, a foundational aspect of

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[16] Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2023). Investment and motivation in language learning: What's the difference? *Language Teaching*, *56*(1), 29–40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000057

[17] Hadi, N., Alvina, N., & Khaled Radhouani. (2024). Ta'zîzu Dâfi'iyyati Thullâbi Riyâdh al-Athfâl li Tathwîri Mahârât al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah al-Syafawiyyah min Khilâli Barâmiji al-Ta'lîm al-Mukatstsaf. *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, *5*(2), 189–214. https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v5i2.12195

early literacy development.[18] When students cannot accurately identify letter shapes and sounds, the decoding process is disrupted, preventing the natural progression of reading proficiency. This situation often leads students to rely on rote memorization strategies rather than structural comprehension, which is ultimately ineffective for building stable literacy skills over time.[19]

In the context of learning Arabic as a second or foreign language, orthographic challenges have particularly significant implications. Arabic script, as a consonantal writing system (abjad), requires students to understand diacritics and word structures from the outset. Without mastery of these basic principles, students struggle not only to read words fluently but also to build the confidence necessary to engage with texts.[20] Bedore et al. emphasize that simple interventions such as daily vocabulary-building through contextual word familiarization can play a crucial role in enhancing word-structure awareness, improving phonetic skills, and fostering students' attachment to the Arabic language. Such strategies provide repeated exposure to key words, strengthening letter-pattern recognition and morphological awareness.[21]

Furthermore, the lack of phonological and orthographic mastery has a direct impact on learning motivation. Students who cannot read fluently tend to feel left behind by their peers, which fosters feelings of

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[18] Abou-Elsaad, T., Ali, R., & Abd El-Hamid, H. (2016). Assessment of Arabic phonological awareness and its relation to word reading ability. *Logopedics Phoniatrics Vocology*, *41*(4), 174–180. https://doi.org/10.3109/14015439.2015.1088062

[19] Gharaibeh, M., Sartawi, A. A., Dodeen, H., & Alzyoudi, M. (2021). Effects of rapid automatized naming and phonological awareness deficits on the reading ability of Arabic-speaking elementary students. *Applied Neuropsychology: Child*, *10*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/21622965.2019.1585247

[20] Khasawneh, M. A. S. (2022). Language Skills and Their Relationship to Learning Difficulties in English Language from the Teachers' Point of View. *The Journal of Quality in Education*, *12*(19), 104–113. https://doi.org/10.37870/joqie.v12i19.308

[21] Bedore, L. M., Peña, E. D., Fiestas, C., & Lugo-Neris, M. J. (2020). Language and Literacy Together: Supporting Grammatical Development in Dual Language Learners With Risk for Language and Learning Difficulties. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, *51*(2), 282–297. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_LSHSS-19-00055

embarrassment, frustration, and even rejection of the subject itself.[22] When reading skills fail to develop adequately, students become trapped in a cycle of academic failure: they are unmotivated because they cannot read, and they cannot read because they lack motivation to learn. In such conditions, teachers must go beyond teaching the technical aspects of reading to rebuilding students' confidence and cultivating positive perceptions of Arabic as a language that can be learned gradually.[23]

External factors, including the shortage of teachers, limited exposure to reading activities at home, and insufficient instructional facilities, create systemic barriers that cannot be overlooked. This reflects the broader reality of rural madrasahs, where educational resources often lag behind the complexity of students' learning needs. Field findings indicate that a single Arabic teacher at MTs Sirajul Huda is responsible for multiple classes with relatively large student populations, while the time allocated for reading instruction is minimal. This results in large-scale, fast-paced instruction with little room for individual feedback, despite students' highly diverse learning needs.

This situation is further compounded by students' heterogeneous social backgrounds, most of whom come from low-literacy families. As Hussain and Uzuner note, variations in students' socio-economic status strongly affect learning effectiveness, particularly in foreign-language literacy practices. Students who lack reading support at home are entirely dependent on the school, yet the school itself is constrained by limited teaching staff and learning media. This creates gaps in meaningful learning access, leaving students from less supportive backgrounds further behind.[24]

At the institutional level, the lack of Arabic reading materials, the absence of digital learning media, and the suboptimal use of educational

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[22] PAPI, M., & HIVER, P. (2020). Language Learning Motivation as a Complex Dynamic System: A Global Perspective of Truth, Control, and Value. *The Modern Language Journal*, *104*(1), 209–232. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12624

[23] Nanda Siska Safitri, Mohammad Rofiqi, Muhajir, Boby Bagas Purnama, & Shosita Manrova. (2025). TOAFL.com: A CEFR-Based Simulation Platform for Learning Al-Arabiyah Lil Akadimiyah Among Indonesian Students. *Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, *6*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.v6i1.17201

[24] Husain, F., & Uzuner, O. (2022). Transfer Learning Across Arabic Dialects for Offensive Language Detection. *2022 International Conference on Asian Language Processing (IALP)*, 196–205. https://doi.org/10.1109/IALP57159.2022.9961263

technology severely limit students' opportunities to explore and practice qirāʾah independently. Contemporary literature underscores the importance of repeated exposure to texts to accelerate reading development, especially in foreign-language contexts.[25] In the madrasah setting, the absence of a rich literacy environment leaves learning dependent on traditional methods, which are insufficient to stimulate interest and self-confidence. Consequently, instruction becomes mechanical and low in creativity, failing to foster meaningful engagement between students and texts.[26]

Nevertheless, findings indicate that teachers at MTs Sirajul Huda have implemented contextual and adaptive teaching strategies. Daily vocabulary reinforcement and the integration of Islamic values in reading practice are forms of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) proven to enhance students' interest and comprehension in multiple studies.[27] Theoretically, this approach improves retention and strengthens the relevance of learning materials to students' lived experiences.[28]

Moreover, institutional support, though limited, reflects an openness to teacher-driven innovation, which is highlighted in literature on school-based innovation. Local initiatives, such as small project-based learning and informal after-class training, illustrate that meaningful change can originate at the grassroots level rather than relying solely on centralized policies.[29]

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[25] Pikri, F. (2022). The Role of the Language Environment in Improving Arabic Learning Abilities. *International Journal of Science and Society*, *4*(2), 346–354. https://doi.org/10.54783/ijsoc.v4i2.478

[26] Alsalihi, H. D. (2020). Main Difficulties Faced by EFL Students in Language Learning. *Journal of the College of Education for Women*, *31*(2), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v31i2.1359

[27] Afnita, Efrianto, Siti Ansoriyah, Fitriani Lubis, Ifnaldi, Zulfikarni, Jr., V. T. D., Mamat, S., Ulya, R. H., Rachman, A., & Nurrahmah, F. (2025). Developing CTL-Based Digital Media E-Worksheet for Second Language Learning. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, *7*(6). https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i6.9665

[28] Tari, D. K., & Rosana, D. (2019). Contextual Teaching and Learning to Develop Critical Thinking and Practical Skills. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, *1233*(1), 012102. https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1233/1/012102

[29] Jaelani, A., & Zabidi, O. W. (2020). Junior high school students' difficulties of English language learning in the speaking and listening section. *ELT Forum: Journal of English Language Teaching*, *9*(1), 45–54. https://doi.org/10.15294/elt.v9i1.38287

Overall, this study reinforces the notion that mastery of Arabic reading requires a holistic approach: strengthening foundational skills, fostering motivation, creating a supportive learning environment, and enabling teachers to adopt contextually responsive strategies. These findings open the door for future research to develop qirāʾah instructional models tailored to rural madrasah contexts and to design intensive teacher-training programs for implementing CTL effectively in resource-limited settings.

Conclusion

This study concludes that reading (*qirāʾah*) difficulties among eighth-grade students at MTs Sirajul Huda Tigabinanga Karo arise from the interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors include low learning motivation, negative perceptions toward Arabic, and weak mastery of *hijaiyah* letters and diacritical marks. External factors involve limited learning facilities and media, a shortage of teachers, short instructional time, and minimal literacy support from students' home environments. Despite these barriers, the Arabic teacher employed adaptive strategies, such as daily vocabulary-building, reinforcement of letter recognition, and the integration of Islamic values in instruction.

Based on these findings, this study proposes three strategic recommendations. First, teachers should develop varied, context-based, and engaging *qirāʾah* instructional methods. Second, madrasah administrators should strengthen institutional support by providing additional reading materials, scheduling remedial sessions, and implementing literacy programs aligned with students' religious activities. Third, collaboration with parents should be enhanced to cultivate home-based reading habits. By implementing these recommendations, *qirāʾah* learning in resource-constrained madrasahs can become more effective and sustainable, while also encouraging the development of context-oriented follow-up studies for future educational improvement.

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