



A Qualitative Study of Beginner Students' Experiences and Perceptions in Arabic Language Learning at MTs Babul Mujahidin Bayan, Lombok Utara

Yesinta Isnaini ¹, Mustar ², Yogia Prihartini ³, Dina Chabib Uluum ⁴, Maryam A'miri Al-Hamami ⁵, Putri Hardiyanti ⁶

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

² Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

⁵ Universitas Zaitunah, Tunisia

⁶ Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Yesinta Isnaini, E-mail: snyesinta@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Arabic language learning plays a vital role for Muslims, serving not only as a means of communication but also as an integral component of religious practice. Despite this, many beginner-level students face difficulties in understanding Arabic lessons, particularly in madrasahs where Arabic has not yet become a primary focus. This study aims to explore beginner students' perceptions of Arabic language learning at MTs Babul Mujahidin Bayan, Lombok Utara, to provide insights for designing more effective instructional strategies. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving six eighth-grade students as participants. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that while students demonstrate a relatively high interest in learning Arabic, they struggle with reading Arabic texts and comprehending classroom materials due to limited foundational skills and monotonous teaching methods. Nonetheless, students expressed positive attitudes and a desire for more engaging and interactive learning processes, such as gamified activities and visual media. The study contributes to Arabic language education by highlighting the importance of incorporating student-centered, interactive strategies at the beginner level, offering evidence-based recommendations for improving instructional design in madrasah settings.

Keywords: Arabic Language Learning, Beginner Students' Perceptions, Qualitative Approach.

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in human communication as a medium for expressing ideas, thoughts, and emotions (Iswanto, 2017). Among world languages, Arabic holds a distinctive position due to its religious, cultural, and international significance. Since the revelation of the Qur'an and the spread of Islam, Arabic has been widely used by more than 200 million speakers worldwide (Aprizal, 2021).

For Muslims, Arabic is not only a means of communication but also an integral component of religious practice, as the Qur'an and daily prayers must be recited in Arabic (Umami & Hikmah, 2025). In Indonesia, Arabic is a compulsory subject taught in Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) (Institut Agama Islam Negeri Samarinda et al., 2020). At the madrasah level, Arabic learning plays a strategic role in building students' religious, moral, and academic foundations. Mastery of Arabic enables students to access Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith directly, thereby deepening their religious understanding without relying solely on translations (Zakiyah, 2024). Arabic language learning is also viewed as a process of transforming knowledge, attitudes, and linguistic behavior in a structured and goal-oriented manner (Rini et al., 2023). However, despite its importance, the outcomes of Arabic language learning in Indonesia have not yet been fully satisfactory. Several factors contribute to this condition, including curriculum design, teachers' readiness, and the suitability of teaching materials with learning objectives (Syaifullah & Izzah, 2019).

In the context of contemporary education, Arabic learning is expected to adapt to students' characteristics and the demands of the Industry 4.0 era. Nevertheless, students' interest in learning Arabic in madrasah settings remains relatively low. Many students perceive Arabic as a difficult subject, which reduces their engagement and motivation in the learning process (Juryatina & Amrin, 2021). This situation highlights the importance of adopting learning strategies that are not only linguistically appropriate but also psychologically supportive of learners, particularly beginners.

One psychological aspect that significantly influences learning is perception. Perception refers to an individual's process of receiving, interpreting, and assigning meaning to stimuli through the senses (Prabawati et al., 2021). According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, perception is an individual's response or interpretation of information obtained through sensory experience (Najichun & Winarso, 2017, p. 140). In educational contexts, students' perceptions toward a subject can affect their motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Learning motivation itself is defined as both internal and external drives that encourage students to engage in learning activities and achieve behavioral change (Hilmi & Nurhayati, 2024). Although motivation is important, successful learning also depends on the compatibility between instructional strategies and students' abilities and interests (Sa'diyah & Abdurahman, 2021).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that students' perceptions play a crucial role in learning outcomes across various subjects. Sari and Harini (2015) found a positive relationship between students' perceptions of mathematics and their motivation, independence, and academic achievement (Sari & Harini, 2015). Similarly, Rohani and Zulfah (2021) reported that positive student perceptions of learning media enhanced interest and engagement in learning activities (Rohani & Zulfah, 2021). Wulandari et al. (2021) also revealed that students' perceptions of teachers' instructional methods significantly influenced learning outcomes (W. Wulandari et al., 2021). In the context of Arabic language education, Alhaq (2024) emphasized that no single teaching method is universally effective, particularly for beginner learners, and that instructional strategies should be adapted to students' needs and characteristics (Alhaq, 2024).

Within the current national education policy, madrasah education is directed toward the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, learner-centered instruction, and contextual learning. This curriculum provides teachers with autonomy to design learning activities that align with students' needs and learning contexts (Amaliyah et al., 2025). In Arabic language learning, such flexibility is particularly relevant for beginner students, as Arabic has linguistic characteristics that differ significantly from Indonesian. Therefore, students' perceptions become an important indicator for evaluating how the Merdeka Curriculum is experienced and implemented at the classroom level.

Learning is a long-term process aimed at achieving optimal educational outcomes, which requires the use of appropriate and effective learning strategies (Sobron A. N, 2019). In language learning, instructional effectiveness is determined not only by the content being taught but also by the approaches and methods employed by the teacher (Sarbaini & Rahmi, 2024). Therefore, understanding students' perceptions is crucial to ensure that the learning strategies, methods, media, and materials implemented are aligned with their needs and characteristics, enabling Arabic language learning objectives to be achieved more effectively.

This phenomenon can be observed at MT's Babul Mujahidin Bayan, Lombok Utara, Nusa Tenggara Barat. Based on classroom observations and an interview with the Arabic language teacher on May 15, 2025, it was found that Arabic learning at this madrasah remains at a very basic level. Most students are not yet fluent in reading the Qur'an, which affects their ability to read Arabic texts. As a result, students experience difficulties in understanding vocabulary, sentence structures, and reading comprehension. Furthermore, Arabic is not actively used in students' daily lives, which further limits their exposure and practice.

Although numerous studies have examined students' perceptions in various learning contexts, research focusing specifically on beginner-level students at the foundational stage of Arabic language learning in madrasah settings remains limited. Most existing studies emphasize learning outcomes or teaching methods, while students' voices at the early stage of Arabic acquisition are often underrepresented. Understanding beginner students' perceptions

is essential, as it can provide a basis for designing appropriate instructional strategies and evaluating curriculum implementation.

Therefore, this study aims to explore beginner students' perceptions of Arabic language learning at MTs Babul Mujahidin Bayan using a descriptive qualitative approach. By examining students' learning experiences, perceived difficulties, and expectations, this study is expected to provide practical insights for Arabic language teachers and madrasah administrators in developing adaptive, student-centered teaching strategies aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore Arabic language learning through the perspectives of beginner students at MTs Babul Mujahidin Bayan, Lombok Utara, Nusa Tenggara Barat. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, and responses toward Arabic language learning in a natural educational setting.

The participants of this study consisted of six eighth-grade students who were categorized as beginner learners of Arabic, particularly those who demonstrated limited fluency in reading Arabic texts. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on recommendations from the Arabic language teacher. This sampling technique was considered appropriate, as qualitative research emphasizes depth of understanding rather than large sample sizes. The number of participants was deemed sufficient to represent diverse beginner-level perspectives and to achieve data saturation within the scope of a descriptive qualitative study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility for students to express their views while maintaining consistency across interview topics. The interviews explored students' learning experiences, perceived difficulties, classroom atmosphere, instructional methods used by the teacher, learning motivation, and expectations for future Arabic language learning. Interviews were conducted in a familiar school environment to ensure participants' comfort and openness.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the interview guide was reviewed through expert judgment involving the Arabic language teacher and a lecturer with expertise in qualitative research methodology. This process aimed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment of the interview questions with the research objectives.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts were systematically coded and grouped into thematic categories. The findings were then interpreted by identifying patterns and relationships across participants' responses.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through several strategies. Credibility was established through source triangulation by comparing students' responses with information obtained from the teacher and classroom observations. Dependability was maintained by documenting the research procedures clearly and consistently throughout the study. Confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in direct interview excerpts and maintaining an audit trail of data analysis decisions.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed in this study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school, and informed consent was secured from participants and their guardians. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained.

This study is limited to beginner-level students in a single madrasah and does not aim to generalize findings to other proficiency levels or educational contexts. Nevertheless, the findings provide valuable insights into early-stage Arabic language learning in formal madrasah settings and may serve as a foundation for future research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Challenges Faced by Beginner Students

This subsection presents the findings related to the challenges experienced by beginner students in learning Arabic, based on interview data collected at MTs Babul Mujahidin.

The interview results show that most students experience difficulties in learning Arabic, particularly in reading Arabic texts. Many of the participants are still at a basic level of Arabic reading ability. One student stated, “*Kesulitan, karna belum bisa.*” Another student explained that although they were previously able to read more fluently, a lack of regular practice led to a decline in their reading ability: “*Aku lancar tapi udah jarang ngaji jadi ga terlalu lacar kaya waktu itu.*”

Students also reported difficulties in understanding classroom materials. Several participants indicated that they tend to repeat the teacher’s explanations without fully understanding the meaning of the words or sentence structures. This situation is reflected in a student’s statement: “*Tau karna ibunya sebut jadi abis itu ditiruin, kalo ga tau nanya sama temen.*”

Students’ Perceptions of Arabic Language Learning

This subsection presents students’ perceptions of Arabic language learning based on interview data collected at MTs Babul Mujahidin.

The interview results reveal that students have mixed perceptions regarding their understanding of Arabic lessons. Several students stated that they sometimes understand the material, while at other times they do not. One student explained that a lack of focus during lessons affects their understanding: “*Kadang paham kadang engga, karena kami aja kayanya yang kurang perhatian, suka ngobrol sama temen.*”

Students also described the teaching methods used in Arabic language classes. Most participants reported that learning activities mainly involved explanations written on the board. This is reflected in a student’s statement: “*Belajarnya cuma di papan tulis aja.*”

In addition, some students expressed feelings of embarrassment and nervousness when asked to read or perform in front of the class. These feelings were often associated with being watched or laughed at by their peers. One student stated, “*Malu sama temen dilihatin, sering diketawain kalo salah, gemeteran.*”

Students’ Expectations for Arabic Language Learning

This subsection presents students’ expectations regarding Arabic language learning based on interview data.

Despite facing various challenges, students expressed generally positive feelings toward learning Arabic. Some students stated that they still felt happy during the learning process, even though they experienced difficulties. One student said, “*Seneng-seneng aja.*”

Several students also reported attempting to use simple Arabic expressions in daily classroom contexts. These expressions were limited to basic vocabulary such as “*ana*,” “*anti*,” and the names of classroom objects.

Furthermore, students expressed expectations for Arabic language learning to be more interactive and enjoyable. One student stated, “*Belajar sambil bermain, karna bosen kalo liat papan tulis terus, dan cepet lupa. Kita kan kadang baru belajar, ga istirahat terus lanjut jadi cape.*”

Discussion

The analysis of interview results in this study is framed by perception theory, which explains that an individual’s understanding of an object is shaped by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include prior experiences, knowledge, and emotional conditions, while external factors refer to stimuli received through sensory interaction during the learning process. Perception may occur through a bottom-up process, in which meaning is constructed from direct sensory input, or through a top-down process, where prior knowledge and experience influence the interpretation of new information .(Siti Ariska Nur Hasanah et al., 2024). This theoretical perspective provides a basis for interpreting students’ responses and understanding how their learning experiences shape their perceptions of Arabic language learning.

Beginner Students’ Difficulties in Arabic Learning

Such conditions indicate that limited foundational reading skills in Arabic script constitute a major initial barrier for beginner students. Difficulties in recognizing Arabic letters and decoding written forms hinder students’ ability to access meaning, which in turn affects their overall comprehension of classroom materials. This finding supports Harianto’s (2020) argument that reading is a fundamental language skill requiring mastery of letter recognition, word decoding, and textual comprehension. Without adequate reading proficiency, learners tend to rely more on imitation rather than meaningful understanding, which may result in passive learning behavior (Harianto, 2020).

In the context of Arabic language learning, reading skill (*maharah al-qirā’ah*) is regarded as a central component, as it involves complex cognitive processes such as symbol recognition, meaning construction, and interpretation of written texts. Previous studies have shown that beginner learners often encounter difficulties in Arabic reading due to limited mastery of Arabic phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. In addition, internal factors such as low reading interest and insufficient grammatical knowledge, as well as external factors including limited learning resources and the absence of a supportive language environment, significantly contribute to these challenges (Rizka & Ammar, n.d.). These findings are consistent with the present study, which reveals that weak foundational reading skills hinder students’ comprehension and active participation in Arabic learning activities.

Furthermore, earlier research has highlighted that difficulties in reading Arabic texts are influenced by various factors, including low reading interest, insufficient practice, limited discussion activities during reading sessions, and low learning achievement. Mardiyah (2007) found that learners who lacked regular reading practice and motivation tended to experience slower progress and lower confidence in Arabic reading tasks. Similar findings were also reported by Wahdah (2018), who emphasized that limited practice and weak foundational

skills negatively affect students' engagement and comprehension in Arabic reading activities. These factors resonate with the findings of the present study, where beginner students demonstrated limited engagement and difficulty in comprehending Arabic texts due to minimal practice and inadequate reading foundations.(Wahdah, 2018).

Students' Perceptions in Relation to Learning Motivation

Students' perceptions are closely related to their learning motivation, regardless of the object being perceived. A recent study by Novanca et al. (2025) demonstrated that positive student perceptions toward a subject significantly enhance learning motivation and classroom engagement. Conversely, negative perceptions tend to reduce students' interest and participation in learning activities (Novanca et al., 2025).

This relationship between perception and motivation is further supported by Anjelia et al. (2025), who found that negative perceptions of educational costs when viewed as a burden can cause psychological stress, distract students' focus, and ultimately decrease learning motivation. On the other hand, perceiving educational costs as an investment fosters a sense of responsibility and encourages higher motivation to achieve. Although the study focused on financial aspects of education, it reinforces a broader psychological principle that students' perceptions strongly influence their motivational orientation (Anjeli et al., 2025).

In the context of Arabic language learning, beginner students who perceive Arabic as difficult or monotonous may experience reduced motivation and passive learning behavior. This is consistent with the findings of the present study, where students expressed mixed feelings enjoyment accompanied by boredom and lack of understanding which indicates fluctuating motivation influenced by their perceptions of the learning process.

Implications for Arabic Language Teaching at Beginner Level

The findings of this study highlight several challenges faced by beginner students in Arabic learning, including difficulties in reading Arabic texts, limited comprehension of classroom materials, fluctuating motivation, and feelings of embarrassment or anxiety during class activities. These challenges indicate that learners at the foundational stage require instructional strategies that are supportive, engaging, and adapted to their needs. Common challenges often encountered include the limited use of technology in learning, reliance on traditional teaching methods, and insufficient active participation of students during the instructional process (R. Wulandari et al., 2024). To continue advancing and keeping pace with developments in other fields, the education sector must continuously embrace innovation (Chastanti, 2024).

At the beginner level, teaching media play an essential role in facilitating content delivery and achieving learning objectives. Vocabulary or mufrodat can be presented through text, audio, or images, making it easier for students to comprehend. Although this study did not directly test interactive media, previous research suggests that such media can enhance student engagement and motivation (Cholis et al., n.d.) In the context of assessment, technology provides more effective, efficient, and holistic methods for measuring student progress, enabling teachers to monitor development in real-time and deliver immediate feedback (Muhammad Azhar et al., 2025).

AI-based learning media also significantly support learning by offering instant feedback and saving instructional time. Platforms like Quizizz, which use gamification, enable interactive learning both in synchronous and asynchronous modes (Sunarko et al., 2025). Canva can further support Arabic learning by allowing teachers to create visually engaging materials that help students understand abstract concepts such as grammar and vocabulary (Umnah et al., 2024). At the same time, the integration of digital devices can enhance learning interest and social interaction, although potential risks should be carefully managed (Adhimah & Hasan, 2024).

Technology also allows flexible access to learning materials and interaction across distances. Virtual learning environments, such as WhatsApp groups, enable instructions and responses via text or voice notes, promoting active participation and helping mitigate boredom, anxiety, and limited practice opportunities (Faiqoh & Baity, 2024). The use of technological media, such as Smart TVs, is expected to provide a solution to low student learning interest. By presenting materials in a more visual, dynamic, and interactive manner through educational applications, interactive videos, and supporting features, Smart TVs can facilitate more engaging and effective learning (Mufliah & W, 2024).

In addition to media and technology, teaching methods are fundamental in delivering content and achieving objectives. The selection of methods should consider key principles, including alignment with learning goals, student activity, individual differences, and process integrity. Methods can generally be categorized into information-based, assignment-based, problem-solving, and game-based approaches, which, when applied appropriately, can address beginner students' difficulties, enhance motivation, and support comprehension and participation (Zuhdiah et al., 2024).

Finally, students' perceptions are closely tied to their learning motivation. Positive perceptions of learning media can enhance engagement, while negative perceptions—such as boredom, fear of making mistakes, or monotonous instruction—tend to reduce interest and participation (Rohani & Zulfah, 2021). Therefore, integrating interactive media, digital tools, and varied instructional methods in beginner-level Arabic classes can serve as a practical solution to these challenges. By providing diverse, engaging, and learner-centered activities, teachers can foster consistent motivation, improve comprehension, and support overall learning.

These findings contribute to the advancement of beginner-level Arabic teaching by offering evidence-based recommendations for integrating media, technology, and instructional strategies tailored to students' needs.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceptions of beginner students toward Arabic language learning at MTs Babul Mujahidin Bayan, Lombok Utara. The findings indicate that, although students show a high interest in learning Arabic, they face challenges in reading Arabic texts, understanding classroom materials, and maintaining consistent motivation, along with experiencing embarrassment or anxiety during learning activities. These results highlight the importance of implementing adaptive, communicative, and engaging instructional strategies,

including interactive media, digital tools, and varied teaching methods, to support comprehension, motivation, and active participation.

The study is limited to beginner students in a single madrasah, and its findings cannot be generalized to other educational contexts or proficiency levels. Future research is recommended to investigate teachers' perceptions, the effectiveness of interactive media and digital tools, and the impact of diverse teaching methods on student motivation and learning outcomes.

This research contributes to the field by emphasizing the role of beginner students' perceptions as a foundation for designing Arabic language learning strategies that are tailored to students' needs, aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, and theoretically linked to the relationship between perception, motivation, and learning effectiveness in Arabic language education.

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