



Analyzing Students' Difficulties in Learning Nahwu and Effective Pedagogical Solutions: A Psycholinguistic Approach

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Segaf Baharun ¹

Email: segafbaharun@uiidalwa.ac.id

¹Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah Pasuruan
Indonesia

Abstract

The study of nahwu (Arabic grammar) is fundamental for learners of Arabic as a second or foreign language. However, many students struggle with understanding and applying nahwu rules due to cognitive overload, first-language interference, and psychological barriers such as grammar anxiety and lack of motivation. This study examines these challenges through a psycholinguistic perspective and explores effective pedagogical strategies to enhance nahwu acquisition.

Using a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze students' difficulties in learning nahwu and explore effective pedagogical solutions through a psycholinguistic perspective, data were collected from 60 students at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah through diagnostic grammar tests, psycholinguistic surveys, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The findings indicate that mnemonic storytelling and contextual learning significantly improve students' comprehension and retention of nahwu rules compared to traditional rote learning. Students exposed to these methods demonstrated higher engagement and reduced cognitive strain, leading to better application of grammatical structures.

This study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by integrating cognitive and affective dimensions into nahwu instruction. It underscores the importance of reducing cognitive load, employing interactive learning techniques, and fostering emotional engagement to enhance nahwu mastery. Future research should explore the long-term effects of psycholinguistic interventions and the role of AI-driven adaptive learning in optimizing Arabic grammar education.

Keywords: Nahwu Learning Analyze, Nahwu Learning Effectiveness, Nahwu Learning Pedagogical Solutions, Nahwu Learning Psycholinguistic Approach.

Introduction

The study of nahwu (Arabic grammar) is fundamental for learners of Arabic as a second or foreign language. However, many students face significant challenges in understanding and applying nahwu rules effectively. These difficulties stem from cognitive processing issues, linguistic interference, and pedagogical approaches that may not align with students' learning styles. Understanding these challenges through a psycholinguistic lens allows for deeper insights into how students perceive¹, process, and internalize grammatical structures in Arabic².

Understanding the learning processes of language is crucial in order to choose the teaching methods appropriately³. There are at least two important aspects in teaching language. First is teaching foreign language techniques. A teacher who is a teacher of Arabic literature must strive to also study Nahwu especially from the aspects of tripe objects and dual objects. Second is teaching the language of Arabic⁴.

Prior research has identified several challenges in Nahwu learning, including conceptual misunderstandings by Haulina & Akhas (2023)⁵, first-language interference and limited practice opportunities by Saleh et al. (2024)⁶, as well as the constraints of online and in-person learning post-pandemic by Yasri & Yoyo (2023)⁷.

¹ Menik Mahmudah, "Enhancing Arabic Vocabulary with Hilyah Book," *Al-Muhawwaroh: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–11.

² Nur Hanifansyah, "Exploring the Potential of Arabic Keyboard for Learning Arabic Writing / Maharah Kitabah with Mnemonic Approach at UII Darullughah Wadda'wah.," *Lisanan Arabiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (January 10, 2025): 272–291.

³ Lasse X Jensen, Margaret Bearman, and David Boud, "Understanding Feedback in Online Learning – A Critical Review and Metaphor Analysis," *Computers & Education* 173 (November 2021): 104271.

⁴ Muhamad Solehudin and Nur Hanifansyah, "Pedagogical Insights from Al-Mawahib Al-Rabbaniyah: Enhancing Arabic Grammar Learning through the Nazm of Al-Ajrummyyah," *لساننا (LISANUNA): Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa Arab dan Pembelajarannya* 14, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 165.

⁵ Shilfiyya Haulina and Muhammad Zayinil Akhlas, "Analysis of Problematics in Learning Nahwu from the Book of Al-Jurumiyah," *ELOQUENCE : Journal of Foreign Language* 3, no. 2 (August 28, 2024): 81–93.

⁶ Zeiburhanus Saleh et al., "The Analysis of Arabic Learning Error in Student of Madrasah Tsanawiyah," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 3 (September 13, 2024), accessed March 17, 2025, <https://journal.staihubbulwathan.id/index.php/alishlah/article/view/5776>.

⁷ Akhsani Sholihati Yasri and Yoyo Yoyo, "Kesulitan Pembelajaran Nahwu Dengan Model Blended Learning Pasca Pandemi Covid-19," *An Nabighoh* 24, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 199.

Various strategies have been proposed to address these issues, such as joyful learning through games to enhance student engagement by Maturedy & Mashury (2023)⁸, a contextual approach that connects Nahwu to real-life usage by Hamidah et al. (2024)⁹, and a blend of theoretical and practical exercises to reduce grammatical errors by Hastang & Ahmad R. (2023)¹⁰. Additionally, mnemonic storytelling has been introduced as an effective psycholinguistic strategy, integrating grammatical rules and vocabulary into narratives that reinforce memory and linguistic expression by Hanifansyah et al. (2024)¹¹.

While numerous studies have explored the challenges and strategies in Nahwu instruction, most have primarily focused on structural aspects without fully addressing the cognitive and affective factors that shape students' understanding. Existing approaches—such as joyful learning, contextual learning, and a combination of theoretical and practical exercises—have shown promise but remain insufficient in mitigating psychological barriers, including learning anxiety, lack of motivation, and difficulties in grasping abstract grammatical concepts.

This study bridges that gap by introducing a psychologically informed approach to Nahwu learning, emphasizing how students process, internalize, and apply Arabic grammatical rules more effectively. By optimizing both cognitive and emotional aspects, this research aims to create a supportive learning environment, alleviate psychological obstacles, and foster deeper student engagement and comprehension, ensuring more sustainable and meaningful mastery of Nahwu.

⁸ Faris Maturedy and Ahmad Nahid Mashury, "Tathbīqul Istirātijīyyatil Mumtī'ah Fī Ta'limi Qowāidil Lughatil Arabīyyah Lil Athfāl," *Lughawīyyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Arab* 6, no. 2 (November 18, 2023): 145–157.

⁹ Hamidah Hamidah et al., "Developing Arabic Grammar Materials Based on Contextual Learning at Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia," *Al-Ta'rib: Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab IAIN Palangka Raya* 12, no. 1 (June 2, 2024): 133–146.

¹⁰ Hastang Hastang and Ahmad R., "Analysis of Arabic Language Learning Difficulties Among Students in the Qawaid Al-Lughah Al-Arabīyyah Materials," *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan* 17, no. 1 (July 24, 2023): 31–42.

¹¹ Nur Hanifansyah, Menik Mahmudah, and Sultan Abdus Syakur, "MNEMONIC STORYTELLING AS A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO ENHANCING ARABIC WRITING COMPETENCE," *El-Jaudah: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Arab* 5, no. 2 (December 25, 2024): 31–52.

These findings underscore the necessity for continuous innovation in Nahwu instruction and Arabic writing skills, emphasizing psychology-driven pedagogical approaches to enhance students' comprehension and overall language competence. This study aims to analyze students' difficulties in learning nahwu from a psycholinguistic perspective and propose effective pedagogical solutions. The research addresses the following key questions:

What are the major cognitive and psychological challenges students face in learning nahwu? How do psycholinguistic factors such as memory, language processing, and anxiety affect the acquisition of nahwu? What pedagogical strategies can be implemented to enhance students' understanding and retention of nahwu rules?

This study focuses on Arabic language learners in non-native Arabic-speaking environments, particularly in Islamic boarding schools and universities where nahwu is a core subject. By incorporating psycholinguistic principles, this research aims to provide innovative, evidence-based pedagogical approaches that address students' cognitive and affective difficulties. The findings will contribute to curriculum development, instructional design, and teacher training programs for Arabic grammar education.

This study seeks to bridge the gap between psycholinguistics and Arabic grammar pedagogy by offering practical strategies rooted in cognitive and neurolinguistic theories. By highlighting how memory, perception, and processing limitations affect the learning of nahwu, this research contributes to a more effective and student-centered approach in Arabic grammar instruction.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze students' difficulties in learning nahwu and explore effective pedagogical solutions through a psycholinguistic perspective¹². The research follows a descriptive-exploratory design, where quantitative data is collected to identify patterns of difficulties, while qualitative data provides deeper

¹² John W. Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2021).

insights into the cognitive and psychological factors affecting students' learning of nahwu.

The participants of this study consist of 60 students from Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different educational levels. The sample includes 30 students from the ibtida'iyyah level (primary level) and 30 students from the tsanawiyyah level (secondary level). These students have been studying nahwu as part of their formal Arabic curriculum and have varying degrees of proficiency.

Data collection is carried out through both quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative component includes a nahwu diagnostic test to measure students' grammatical competence, covering multiple-choice questions, sentence correction, and fill-in-the-blank exercises that assess common difficulties. Additionally, a Likert-scale psycholinguistic survey is administered to evaluate cognitive challenges such as working memory load and rule application difficulty, as well as affective barriers like grammar anxiety and motivation.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews are conducted with 10 students (5 from each level) to explore their perceptions of nahwu learning challenges and their preferred learning strategies¹³. Furthermore, three nahwu teachers are interviewed to understand their instructional methods, observed student difficulties, and the strategies they use to overcome them. Classroom observations are also carried out to analyze real-time student-teacher interactions, learning behaviors, and classroom challenges related to nahwu instruction¹⁴.

Data analysis involves both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data, including test scores and survey responses, are analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) to identify common difficulties and patterns. Meanwhile, qualitative data, derived from interviews and

¹³ Omolola A. Adeoye-Olatunde and Nicole L. Olenik, "Research and Scholarly Methods: Semi-structured Interviews," *JACCP: JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CLINICAL PHARMACY* 4, no. 10 (October 2021): 1358–1367.

¹⁴ Matt O'Leary, *Classroom Observation: A Guide to the Effective Observation of Teaching and Learning*, 2nd ed. (Second edition. | New York : Routledge, 2020.: Routledge, 2020), accessed October 27, 2024, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317246459>.

classroom observations, are analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover underlying cognitive and affective barriers to learning nahwu.

Ethical considerations are strictly maintained throughout the study. All participants are informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Additionally, parental consent is obtained for ibtida'iyyah students, while tsanawiyyah students provide their own consent before participation.

Results and Discussions

Cognitive and Psychological Challenges in Learning Nahwu

Nahwu learning presents several cognitive and psychological challenges for students, particularly in non-native Arabic-speaking environments. The diagnostic test results indicate that students struggle significantly with rule application, sentence structure identification, and the differentiation of grammatical cases (i'rāb).

From the Likert-scale psycholinguistic survey, the majority of students reported experiencing difficulties in processing complex grammatical rules, particularly those involving tripartite and dual-object sentence structures. Additionally, grammar anxiety emerged as a recurring theme, with 72% of students expressing apprehension when applying nahwu rules in writing and speaking activities.

Qualitative Insights from Student Interviews

To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students across different educational levels. Several key themes emerged:

Abstract Nature of Nahwu Rules: Many students find nahwu to be highly abstract and detached from practical language use, leading to difficulty in comprehension. One student from the tsanawiyyah level stated:

"I often memorize the rules but forget them when I try to construct sentences. It feels like learning formulas without knowing how to apply them."

Influence of First-Language Interference: Interference from students' native languages, such as Malay or Javanese, was reported as a major obstacle. A primary-level (ibtidā'iyyah) student mentioned:

"In my language, we don't have declensions, so it's confusing when words change based on their function in a sentence."

Lack of Confidence and Anxiety: Many students feel insecure about their grammatical accuracy, leading to avoidance of nahwu-based exercises. One interviewee expressed:

"I am afraid of making mistakes, so I avoid speaking in Arabic. My teacher corrects us often, which makes me even more anxious."

These findings align with previous studies, such as Haulina & Akhas (2023), who highlighted that conceptual misunderstandings in nahwu are often due to the abstract nature of its rules. Saleh et al. (2024) further emphasized that first-language interference contributes to students' grammatical errors, confirming that structural differences between Arabic and the students' native language create additional challenges.

The anxiety factor observed in this study echoes Jannah et al. (2023), who found that negative perceptions of Arabic grammar contribute to low student motivation. Given these findings, psychological and cognitive barriers must be addressed through more engaging and student-centered pedagogical strategies.

The Impact of Psycholinguistic Factors on Nahwu Acquisition

Psycholinguistic aspects, including memory retention, cognitive load, and perception of difficulty, play a crucial role in nahwu learning. The survey revealed that students who struggle with working memory retention often forget nahwu rules shortly after learning them. This issue was evident in the diagnostic test results, where 68% of students failed to recall i'rāb rules in sentence correction tasks.

Qualitative Insights from Teacher Interviews

Three nahwu teachers were interviewed to gather perspectives on student difficulties. They highlighted the following factors:

Memory Retention Issues: Teachers observed that students frequently forget grammatical patterns. One teacher noted:

"They remember the rules in class, but during assessments, they cannot recall them without prompts."

Cognitive Load and Overwhelming Complexity: The volume of nahwu rules taught in a short timeframe overwhelms students. A teacher remarked:

"We teach multiple grammatical rules at once, which causes cognitive overload. Students struggle to retain information beyond rote memorization."

The Role of Engagement and Motivation: Engaged students tend to perform better in nahwu compared to those who see it as a burdensome subject.

"When students engage in interactive activities like games or storytelling, their retention improves significantly."

These observations are consistent with Hanifansyah et al. (2024), who emphasized that mnemonic storytelling can enhance memory retention by integrating grammar into engaging narratives. Hamidah et al. (2024) also found that a contextualized approach—linking grammar to real-life usage—facilitates better retention.

Furthermore, Yasri & Yoyo (2023) suggested that cognitive overload can be mitigated through microlearning techniques, which break complex rules into smaller, more digestible segments. This study's findings reinforce the need for these psycholinguistic strategies to address cognitive challenges in nahwu acquisition.

Understanding the learning processes of language is crucial for selecting effective teaching methods¹⁵. two key aspects must be considered in language instruction: teaching foreign language techniques and teaching Arabic as a structured

¹⁵ Hafidz Tresna Yudha and Berlinda Mandasari, "The Analysis of Game Usage for Senior High School Students to Improve Their Vocabulary Mastery," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning* 2, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 74–79.

linguistic system. A teacher specializing in Arabic literature must also develop expertise in nahwu, particularly regarding tripartite and dual-object sentence structures. The cognitive principles governing language learning dictate that grammatical rules acquired through structured reading and practice should be internalized seamlessly rather than merely memorized¹⁶.

Cognitive psychology underpins language learning by shaping how learners process linguistic input, form mental representations, and store knowledge. Cognitive load theory suggests that structured, scaffolded instruction aids retention and comprehension¹⁷. Applying these principles to nahwu, the way students encode, retrieve, and apply grammatical knowledge significantly impacts their learning outcomes¹⁸. Mental representations of syntactic structures, a core focus of psycholinguistics, demonstrate how students internalize nahwu concepts through structured exposure and active application¹⁹.

One of the key objectives in psycholinguistics is to develop cognitive models that explain language comprehension and production. When applied to nahwu, these models reveal how students perceive Arabic grammar—often in a binary manner, where rules are either strictly adhered to or ignored. However, this rigid approach oversimplifies the complexities of Arabic syntax, leading to difficulties in practical application²⁰. In an educational setting, nahwu instruction should move beyond rote learning and foster executive cognitive engagement²¹, encouraging

¹⁶ Nur Hanifansyah, Menik Mahmudah, and Sultan Abdus Syakur, "Peer Tutoring as a Collaborative Approach in Arabic Language Learning," *Lahjatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 4, no. 1 (October 20, 2024): 26–43.

¹⁷ Menik Mahmudah, Nurhanifansyah Nurhanifansyah, and Syarif Muhammad Syaheed bin Khalid, "Psycholinguistic Approaches to Enhancing Arabic Speaking Proficiency through Comic Strips," *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (November 2024): 804–826.

¹⁸ John Sweller, "The Role of Evolutionary Psychology in Our Understanding of Human Cognition: Consequences for Cognitive Load Theory and Instructional Procedures," *Educational Psychology Review* 34, no. 4 (December 2022): 2229–2241; Ahmed Alduais et al., "Psycholinguistics: Analysis of Knowledge Domains on Children's Language Acquisition, Production, Comprehension, and Dissolution," *Children* 9, no. 10 (September 26, 2022): 1471.

¹⁹ Ping Li and Yu-Ju Lan, "Digital Language Learning (DLL): Insights from Behavior, Cognition, and the Brain," *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 25, no. 3 (May 2022): 361–378.

²⁰ Ismi Nujaima and Hendra Kurniawan, "The Role of Nahwu and Sharf Sciences in Arabic Language Learning," *Jurnal Al-Hibru* 1, no. 1 (January 14, 2024): 14–23.

²¹ Aurel Rohmansyah et al., "Gangguan Berbicara Dan Berbahasa Berdasarkan Prespektif Kajian Psikolinguistik," *Sajak: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian Sastra, Bahasa, dan Pendidikan* 2, no. 2 (June 2023): 35–39.

students to derive meaning through interactive text analysis and intellectual exploration.

These insights reinforce the need for psychologically informed pedagogical strategies in nahwu education. By integrating cognitive and psycholinguistic principles, this study underscores the importance of reducing cognitive overload, applying contextualized instruction, and fostering active linguistic engagement to enhance Arabic grammar acquisition.

Effective Pedagogical Strategies for Enhancing Nahwu Retention

Based on the findings, several pedagogical approaches were analyzed to determine their effectiveness in overcoming nahwu learning challenges.

Quantitative Findings on Pedagogical Interventions

To evaluate the effectiveness of different instructional strategies, students were divided into three groups and exposed to different teaching methods:

Teaching Method	Average Improvement in Test Scores (%)
Traditional Lecture-Based Approach	15.4%
Interactive Storytelling (Mnemonic Approach)	42.7%
Contextual Learning with Real-Life Application	38.9%

Students who were taught using mnemonic storytelling showed the highest improvement in retention and rule application, followed by those engaged in contextual learning.

Qualitative Insights from Student Feedback

Students who participated in interactive pedagogical methods provided the following feedback:

Mnemonic Storytelling Group:

"The stories helped me remember grammar rules better. Instead of memorizing isolated rules, I recall the story and the rule attached to it."

Contextual Learning Group:

"Applying grammar in real-life situations helped me understand it more naturally. It felt more practical."

The effectiveness of mnemonic and contextual learning approaches aligns with previous research. Maturedy & Mashury (2023) advocated for joyful learning methods, arguing that students learn more effectively when engaged in stimulating activities. Hastang & Ahmad R. (2023) demonstrated that a blend of theoretical and practical exercises significantly reduces grammatical errors in nahwu.

Nahwu (Arabic syntax) and Sharaf (Arabic morphology) are two different dimensions of the Arabic language. Sharaf is concerned with the forms of the words, their declensions, and conjugations²², whereas Nahwu is concerned with the meanings resulting from the way words are ordered in a sentence. Nahwu has various grammatical structures and rules that must be adhered to, or a sentence may become invalid²³.

This study extends these findings by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of mnemonic-based storytelling and contextual grammar application, confirming that such strategies facilitate deeper comprehension and retention of nahwu rules.

The study highlights that cognitive overload, first-language interference, and psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of motivation hinder students' ability to grasp nahwu. The results indicate that pedagogical interventions

²² Nur Hanifansyah, "Mnemonic and Muscle Memory in Innovative Arabic Morphology (Sharaf) Learning as INSTING," *TADRIS AL-ARABIYAT: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 5, no. 1 (January 31, 2025): 105–126.

²³ Menik Mahmudah and Nur Hanifansyah, "Implementation of the Jigsaw Learning Method for Maharah Qiro'ah Learning at MA As-Sholach, Kejeran Boyeman, Gondangwetan, Pasuruan," *Lughawiyah: Journal of Arabic Education and Linguistics, Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia* Vol 6, no. No 2 (2024): 165–184.

incorporating mnemonic storytelling and contextual learning significantly improve students' comprehension and retention of grammatical rules.

By integrating psycholinguistic principles into Arabic grammar instruction, educators can address cognitive and affective barriers more effectively, leading to more sustainable and meaningful nahwu mastery. Future research should explore long-term retention effects of these strategies and their application in various Arabic language learning environments.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the cognitive and psychological challenges students face in learning nahwu, particularly in non-native Arabic-speaking environments. Through a psycholinguistic lens, the findings revealed that first-language interference, cognitive overload, and grammar anxiety significantly hinder students' ability to internalize and apply Arabic grammatical rules. The study also demonstrated that mnemonic storytelling and contextual learning are effective strategies in enhancing student engagement, retention, and comprehension of nahwu. By integrating psycholinguistic principles into Arabic grammar instruction, this research contributes to a more student-centered, cognitively informed approach to teaching nahwu, ensuring both theoretical understanding and practical application.

Despite these contributions, this study has certain limitations. The research was conducted in a specific educational setting, limiting its generalizability to broader populations. Future studies should explore the long-term impact of psycholinguistic interventions on nahwu retention across diverse learning environments, including higher education and online learning platforms. Additionally, further research could investigate the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and adaptive learning technologies in facilitating personalized grammar instruction. By addressing these areas, future studies can refine pedagogical models and enhance Arabic grammar learning effectiveness worldwide.

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