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Using Illustrated Stories to Scaffold Arabic Listening and Speaking: A Qualitative Case Study in an Indonesian Tahfizh Boarding School

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines how illustrated stories and short Arabic animated narratives were used to support listening and speaking instruction among first-year senior secondary students at Bina Tahfizh Indonesia Islamic boarding school in Bogor. The original classroom account involved six students and two teachers, with classroom observations and teacher interviews as its principal evidence. The article develops a five-stage pedagogical interpretation of the documented lessons: pre-listening prediction, synchronized audiovisual presentation, comprehension checking, oral reconstruction, and formative feedback. Findings suggest that visual sequencing offered contextual cues for following narrative events, recognizing familiar vocabulary, and organizing spoken responses. Teacher-guided retelling and role-play created opportunities for low-stakes oral participation. The interpretation is bounded by the small qualitative sample, incomplete interview and observation protocols, and the absence of recoverable individual language-test scores. Therefore, the article makes no claim of statistically significant improvement or causal treatment effects. By relating the local case to recent scholarship on multimodal learning, Arabic language pedagogy, and digital storytelling, the study proposes a practical framework for aligning narrative media with explicit listening and speaking goals and identifies priorities for more rigorous classroom inquiry.

Keywords: *Illustrated stories; Arabic listening; Arabic speaking; Multimodal scaffolding; Digital storytelling; Islamic boarding school*.

Introduction

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Arabic learning in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools operates at the intersection of religious literacy, formal academic requirements, and everyday communicative needs. Students may encounter Arabic through Qur'anic recitation, religious texts, grammar lessons, and oral exchanges, but these forms of exposure do not automatically develop the same linguistic capacities. Recognizing written vocabulary and reproducing grammatical patterns differ from interpreting a continuous spoken message and responding spontaneously. Recent research on children in pesantren identifies listening and articulation as interrelated components of Arabic proficiency (Akla & Arifin, 2024), while studies of language environments and teaching strategies underscore the importance of opportunities to use language in meaningful situations (Putri & Muflihah, 2026; Anwar & Mauludiyah, 2022).

Listening comprehension requires learners to recognize sounds, segment speech, identify words, infer relationships among clauses, and construct a coherent representation of what a speaker means. These processes are particularly demanding when learners encounter unfamiliar pronunciation, limited vocabulary, or rapid connected speech. Spoken Arabic can also present a mismatch between textbook language and the varieties encountered in audio and video. Technology may expand access to spoken input, but access is not equivalent to understanding: media selection, task design, repetition, and teacher mediation remain necessary (Jannah et al., 2022; Azka et al., 2024; Rosyad et al., 2026).

Speaking presents a related but distinct challenge. Learners must retrieve expressions, construct intelligible utterances, manage hesitation, and adapt language to listeners and situations. An exclusive focus on accuracy can restrict opportunities for exploratory talk, while unguided conversation may overwhelm students with limited linguistic resources. Contextual instruction, staged practice, and cooperative tasks provide alternative pathways for oral development (Sutaman & Febriani, 2021; Wahdah et al., 2024; Amrullah et al., 2023). The challenge is to connect comprehension with purposeful production rather than teaching listening and speaking as isolated classroom routines.

Illustrated stories offer a potentially productive bridge. Their characters, settings, actions, and temporal sequences create a visible situation to which spoken language can be attached. Learners can first identify what is happening, then listen for how it is expressed, and finally reconstruct the sequence orally. The contribution of pictures is not simply motivational. Visual details can support reference tracking and anticipation; sequential frames can structure recall; and familiar events can provide a common topic for dialogue. Work on bilingual picture books illustrates how compositional features influence meaning-making (Mufida & Ningsih, 2022). Research on digital storytelling similarly points to narrative construction, scaffolding, and learner participation as critical design features (Ong & Aryadoust, 2023; Nurhuda et al., 2026).

Yet illustrated storybooks, animated films, and student-produced digital stories should not be treated as interchangeable. A static picture sequence allows learners to control pacing and inspect details, whereas animation combines movement, timing,

sound, and potentially subtitles. Digital storytelling may additionally require students to author and present narratives. These different affordances can influence attention and language processing. Studies of Arabic animated films, comics, and video-mediated role-play suggest that audiovisual narratives can be adapted to language instruction, but their pedagogical value depends on the relationship between input, task demands, and communicative practice (Amrullah et al., 2024; Yusri et al., 2026; Najib et al., 2026).

The present study revisits an existing qualitative account of classroom use of illustrated stories at Bina Tahfizh Indonesia in Bogor. Preliminary observations in the source report described difficulties reproducing heard sentences and reduced interest when listening relied mainly on the teacher's voice. The instructional response involved narrated pictures and short Arabic animated stories. Rather than presenting the case as an experimental demonstration of effectiveness, this article examines what the observed classroom sequence reveals about the pedagogical organization of listening and speaking. The novelty lies in making the instructional stages explicit, distinguishing documented observation from literature-based interpretation, and identifying the conditions under which narrative media can scaffold oral Arabic.

The study addresses two questions: (1) How were illustrated stories and short audiovisual narratives incorporated into listening and speaking lessons for first-year senior secondary students? (2) What forms of learner engagement and language practice were described, and what are the implications and limits of these observations? The following sections situate the case in recent research, explain its evidentiary boundaries, analyze the five-stage instructional process, and propose directions for classroom assessment.

Method

The research adopted a qualitative case-study design to describe a bounded instructional practice in its natural classroom context. The site was Bina Tahfizh Indonesia Islamic boarding school in Bogor, where Arabic is taught alongside Qur'anic memorization. A case-study approach is appropriate when the aim is to examine the organization, interaction, and perceived meaning of an educational practice rather than to estimate a population-level effect. The unit of analysis in this report is the documented instructional sequence involving illustrated stories and oral Arabic tasks. No new fieldwork was undertaken for this revision.

The source manuscript identifies six first-year senior secondary students and two teachers as participants. They were selected in relation to their involvement in listening and speaking instruction. The evidence described in the source consists principally of classroom observation and teacher interviews. The source also contains photographs of students watching projected material and completing activities, as well as references to short Arabic animated stories from the Kids Zone YouTube channel, reportedly lasting about five to ten minutes. These details establish the broad instructional context but do not establish the number of lessons or the frequency of exposure.

The original abstract refers to language tests, but the manuscript does not provide the test instrument, administration schedule, individual scores, or a coherent analysis of this particular sample. Numerical comparisons and t-test values elsewhere in the source appear in a discussion of earlier film-based studies; they cannot responsibly be transferred to the present case. Accordingly, this revision excludes test-based efficacy claims. Likewise, no verbatim interview transcripts, full observation logs, or documented coding sheets were available to support a quotation-level thematic analysis.

The existing classroom description was organized into five instructional phases explicitly represented in the source: preparation before listening, presentation during listening, comprehension after listening, oral expression, and assessment with feedback. Each phase was interpreted through three questions: what did the teacher do, what learner action was expected or observed, and what language-learning function might that action serve? Recent literature was used as a conceptual comparator rather than as substitute evidence for unrecorded student outcomes. The analysis therefore separates descriptions grounded in the case from pedagogical interpretations and proposed extensions.

This reconstruction cannot claim the full procedural transparency of a prospective qualitative study. The absence of observation dates, interview guides, transcript excerpts, researcher positionality, and an auditable coding trail limits dependability and confirmability. The small, context-specific sample also constrains transferability. These limitations are stated openly so that the reader can assess the strength of each inference. Future replication should archive lesson plans, media titles and links, observation notes, interview prompts, and anonymized performance samples with appropriate consent.

Results and Discussion

Listening and speaking as an integrated pedagogical cycle

The classroom account is best understood as a sequence linking receptive and productive activity. Students were first invited to anticipate narrative content, then listened to an audiovisual presentation, checked their comprehension, and subsequently reconstructed the story in speech. This structure is pedagogically significant because the spoken text is encountered before students are expected to produce related utterances. It creates a shared referential context, reduces the need to invent content, and makes it possible to focus attention on how events are linguistically expressed. Research on Arabic listening materials and speaking pedagogy supports the value of combining guided input with communicative opportunities (Jannah et al., 2022; Sutaman & Febriani, 2021).

The relationship is not a simple one-way transfer from listening to fluent speech. Understanding a narrative does not guarantee that a student can retrieve the necessary words, pronounce them intelligibly, or sustain interaction. Conversely, an oral response can be partially correct even when a learner has missed important details. Teachers therefore need to observe comprehension and production separately while using one task to inform the other. Work on communicative competence and contextual teaching

highlights the importance of attending to interactional purposes, learner perceptions, and classroom environment (Sanusi et al., 2024; Wahdah et al., 2024; Gu & Ismail, 2024).

The source describes the teacher displaying story pictures without immediately reading the narrative and asking students to anticipate its topic and events. This phase gave learners a reason to attend to the coming audio. Questions about the people, location, and likely actions in the pictures could activate familiar vocabulary and encourage tentative spoken responses. The picture sequence also made the lesson topic more accessible before the learners faced continuous Arabic speech.

Prediction should be framed as a hypothesis rather than a test of guessing correctly. A learner may infer that a character is travelling, for example, without yet knowing the relevant Arabic verb. The teacher can use this gap to introduce a small set of high-utility words while preserving the need to listen for confirmation. Too much pre-teaching, however, can reduce authentic comprehension demands and turn the task into picture naming. Effective preparation is therefore selective: identify the key characters, clarify only essential vocabulary, and set a specific listening purpose. Multimodal composition research offers a useful rationale for connecting visual information with later linguistic choices (Mufida & Ningsih, 2022; Nurhuda et al., 2026).

During presentation, the teacher either read the narrative expressively or played recorded speech while showing the relevant images. Learners were asked to attend to the central idea and sequence of events. The source describes the option to pause, repeat, or explain difficult portions. In the classroom context, this combination allowed spoken language to be heard while the visual scene remained available as a contextual reference. Short animated stories were used as part of the available media repertoire, although the source does not provide a complete inventory of videos or transcripts.

A key pedagogical distinction concerns the purpose of each replay. The first listening may target overall meaning; a second can focus on event order or key expressions; a third can support attention to pronunciation or grammatical form. Without distinct goals, repetition risks becoming passive viewing. The teacher can gradually reduce visual support by withholding selected frames or asking students to identify information that the picture alone cannot reveal. Arabic digital listening research indicates that exposure needs to be matched to linguistic readiness, especially where authentic media contain unfamiliar vocabulary or rapid speech (Azka et al., 2024; Muzammil & Mufidah, 2026; Rosyad et al., 2026).

Audio and visuals can complement each other, but they can also compete for attention. Fast animation, decorative text, music, and unrelated motion may distract from the target speech. For beginners, shorter segments and clear narrative progression are more defensible than an assumption that more stimulating media always improve learning. Subtitles constitute another design choice: they may help connect sound with written words, yet they can also shift attention away from listening. The relevant question is whether a feature supports the intended listening objective, not whether it makes the media more technologically sophisticated (Omar & Altohami, 2021; Bustam et al., 2024).

After listening, the teacher asked questions about characters, places, actions, and the sequence of events. The source also describes possible activities in which learners reorder pictures or match images with appropriate sentences. These tasks are important because they make aspects of comprehension observable. Correctly identifying a character may show recognition of a basic reference, whereas reconstructing the event sequence requires integration of several propositions across the narrative.

Comprehension checks should vary in cognitive demand. Literal questions can assess explicitly stated facts; sequencing tasks can assess temporal organization; and inferential questions can explore whether learners understand intentions or consequences. A learner who relies only on the illustrations might answer some questions without understanding the audio, so at least a subset of items should depend on information carried by the spoken language. A simple observation record could distinguish responses based on visual recognition, auditory evidence, and teacher prompting. This is a proposed improvement rather than an instrument used in the original case.

The literature on vocabulary learning suggests that meaningful reuse of words across activities is important. In the present sequence, vocabulary is encountered in a story, recognized during questioning, and potentially retrieved in oral retelling. This creates a more coherent instructional trajectory than presenting disconnected vocabulary lists. Recent Arabic research on show-and-tell, games, and media-based vocabulary practice provides relevant comparisons, although those studies employ different interventions and cannot be treated as direct replication of this case (Hasanah et al., 2024; Candra & Wati, 2026; Muthmainnah et al., 2024).

The source identifies several opportunities for oral production: describing pictures, retelling the narrative in students' own words, role-playing characters, and discussing events with peers. These activities use the same narrative content but impose different speaking demands. Description can begin with isolated phrases or simple clauses. Retelling requires ordering events and maintaining coherence. Role-play introduces speaker roles, turn-taking, and pragmatic choices. Group discussion requires listening to other learners and responding beyond a prepared script.

A staged progression is especially valuable for students who hesitate to speak. The teacher can first model two or three expressions, invite paired rehearsal, and then ask learners to reconstruct the story without reading a full script. Sentence starters can support early attempts, but they should be withdrawn progressively to encourage flexible language use. Repeated retelling may help students organize speech, yet the teacher should distinguish greater willingness to speak from objectively measured gains in accuracy or fluency. Research on digital storytelling and willingness to communicate suggests that narrative tasks can create meaningful opportunities for participation, while studies of Arabic role-play emphasize the importance of structured communicative scenarios (Shen et al., 2023; Najib et al., 2026).

The potential contribution of pictures is particularly clear when students cannot remember an exact phrase. A visual sequence can cue what happened next without supplying the entire utterance. This supports learner agency: students may use available

vocabulary to convey meaning rather than abandon the task. At the same time, an overreliance on pictures could limit attention to listening if students simply narrate what they see. Teachers should therefore include prompts that require reference to what was heard and compare learner retellings with the original story. Related work on animated films and digital comics points to possibilities for engaging oral tasks, but the specific benefits must be evaluated in the local context (Amrullah et al., 2024; Yusri et al., 2026).

In the final phase, the teacher monitored participation, comprehension, and oral expression and provided supportive correction. The source does not document a formal scoring rubric, so it would be inappropriate to report measured improvement in pronunciation, fluency, or vocabulary. Nonetheless, the phase identifies a useful pedagogical principle: feedback should be tied to what the learner was trying to communicate and to a manageable set of language targets.

For listening, teachers might record whether learners can identify the main idea, locate specific information, and reconstruct event order with decreasing assistance. For speaking, a short analytic rubric could attend to comprehensibility, relevant vocabulary, coherence, interaction, and fluency. Such a rubric should be piloted, explained to learners, and applied consistently; otherwise, scores may reflect teacher impressions rather than stable performance. The present article recommends these procedures as future refinements and does not retrospectively claim that they were implemented.

Feedback can combine immediate clarification of meaning with delayed attention to recurrent linguistic errors. Interrupting every utterance may discourage participation, particularly among hesitant beginners. Conversely, avoiding correction entirely may allow persistent misunderstandings. A balanced approach preserves communicative flow while giving students specific examples of how to improve their next attempt. This orientation is compatible with experiential and context-sensitive Arabic speaking instruction (Firdaus, 2024; Sutaman & Febriani, 2021).

Taken together, the five phases illustrate a movement from supported perception to increasingly independent production. Pictures establish a shared situation; narrated language introduces expressions; comprehension tasks test whether learners have understood the sequence; oral tasks require learners to reorganize it; and feedback creates a basis for subsequent practice. The important mechanism is not the image alone but the alignment of narrative content, listening goals, opportunities to speak, and teacher mediation. A similar emphasis on pedagogical design appears in recent reviews of digital storytelling, which caution against attributing outcomes to technology without examining task structure and learner activity (Ong & Aryadoust, 2023; Yu & Zeng, 2026).

The case also differs from many technology-focused studies in two respects. First, the principal evidence is a small-scale description of classroom practice rather than a controlled comparison. Second, the instructional resources appear to combine illustrated narratives and ready-made animated videos rather than a student-authored digital storytelling project. These distinctions matter when interpreting prior work. Teacher TPACK studies address pedagogical competence in adopting digital tools (Amelia et al., 2021), whereas studies of online storytelling performance foreground multimodal

production and public presentation (Anjarsari & Sholikhah, 2026). Their insights are relevant but not directly equivalent to the present classroom activity.

Recent Arabic language studies broaden the comparison. Web-based project learning demonstrates one route to organizing extended language tasks (Rahmah et al., 2024), while visual media and educational games offer other ways to support engagement (Bustam et al., 2024; Candra & Wati, 2026). Research on the correlation among language skills suggests that integrated instruction can be pedagogically coherent (Alkaaideh & Othman, 2024). These studies support a cautious proposition: media are most useful when embedded in an intentional learning sequence. They do not establish that any particular story format is universally superior to audio-only instruction.

The original report describes students attending to the projected narrative and participating in subsequent classroom activities. The available teacher interviews are summarized rather than transcribed. On this basis, it is reasonable to say that the activities were implemented and that teachers perceived advantages for comprehension and willingness to speak. It is not reasonable to infer a statistically significant increase in proficiency. There is no accessible pretest–posttest dataset for the six participants, no comparison group, and no documented standardized scoring procedure.

A second limitation concerns attribution. Students may participate more actively because the lesson is novel, because the teacher offers additional prompts, because the story is familiar, or because they are working with peers. The source does not isolate these influences. Likewise, the effects of visual narrative structure cannot be disentangled from those of spoken narration, animation, repetition, or feedback. These are plausible explanations requiring investigation, not established mechanisms of change. A future study could compare parallel tasks using audio-only, static pictures with audio, and animation with audio while holding vocabulary, story length, and instructional time constant.

The qualitative sample also warrants careful description. Six students and two teachers can provide meaningful insight into local practice, but they cannot represent all Islamic boarding schools or all learners of Arabic. The lack of detailed demographic and proficiency information further limits transferability. Reporting a case faithfully is nevertheless valuable when it identifies a teachable procedure and makes its assumptions transparent. The contribution of this paper is therefore analytic and practical rather than causal.

Teachers considering illustrated stories should begin with learning objectives rather than with media availability. If the primary goal is recognizing temporal markers, the story should contain clear sequencing language and the questions should target event order. If the goal is speaking fluency, the post-listening task should allow repeated but progressively less supported retelling. If the goal is interaction, learners should be required to ask questions, negotiate roles, or respond to peers rather than merely recite a memorized script. Arabic speaking research emphasizes the role of contextualized, purposeful practice in developing communicative competence (Wahdah et al., 2024; Sanusi et al., 2024).

Material selection should also consider linguistic level, cultural appropriateness, sound quality, length, and narrative clarity. Familiar settings may make initial comprehension easier, while carefully selected unfamiliar situations can extend vocabulary and pragmatic awareness. In a tahfizh environment, teachers can connect stories to students' daily routines without assuming that religious literacy alone ensures spoken proficiency. An immersive language environment may strengthen opportunities for transfer beyond the lesson, but classroom tasks still need explicit aims and feedback (Putri & Muflihah, 2026; Anwar & Mauludiyah, 2022).

For a practical lesson, the teacher might select a short story with four to six major events, prepare a small set of target expressions, and design one task for each stage. Students could predict the plot from pictures, listen once for the overall theme, listen again for event details, arrange frames in order, retell the narrative in pairs, and finally respond to formative feedback. The proposed design should be adapted to actual learner proficiency and classroom time. It is offered as a transferable instructional model, not as a reconstruction of unreported lesson counts or a claim that the original participants completed every suggested task.

Teacher preparation is central to implementation. Instructors need to decide when to pause, how much vocabulary to pre-teach, which visual cues to remove, and how to distinguish genuine listening from picture-based guessing. They also need to manage equitable speaking turns and avoid allowing confident students to dominate group retelling. Professional learning focused on the integration of pedagogy, content, and technology is relevant here (Amelia et al., 2021; Sanusi et al., 2024). A simple reflective log after each lesson could document the tasks used, common comprehension problems, student responses, and changes planned for the next meeting.

Future research should establish a transparent baseline for learners' listening and speaking proficiency and specify the number, duration, and content of instructional sessions. A prospective qualitative study could collect dated observation notes, interview transcripts, audio recordings of retellings, and learner reflections. An intervention study could add pretest and posttest assessments, a comparison condition, and an explicit plan for scoring reliability. In both designs, researchers should distinguish comprehension accuracy, vocabulary recognition, fluency, pronunciation, willingness to communicate, and engagement as related but nonidentical outcomes.

Research should also examine differences between static picture stories, narrated slides, and animated video. These formats vary in pacing and cognitive demands; their effectiveness may depend on proficiency, story complexity, and how actively students process the material. Digital storytelling reviews call for stronger methodological reporting and more careful alignment between media design and language outcomes (Ong & Aryadoust, 2023; Yu & Zeng, 2026). Classroom research in Arabic could contribute by testing these distinctions in pesantren settings with transparent measures and by documenting how students use narrative language beyond the immediate lesson.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study documents a five-stage use of illustrated stories and short Arabic animated narratives in listening and speaking instruction at Bina Tahfizh Indonesia Islamic boarding school. The instructional sequence connects pre-listening prediction, synchronized audiovisual input, comprehension tasks, oral retelling, and formative feedback. The classroom account suggests that narrative images provided a shared context for following events and attempting oral responses, while teacher mediation helped connect what students heard with what they were invited to say. These are descriptive observations and pedagogical interpretations, not evidence of causal or statistically significant language gains.

The principal contribution is a clearly articulated model of multimodal scaffolding for integrated Arabic oral-skill instruction. The model emphasizes purposeful story selection, differentiated listening tasks, progressive removal of support, meaningful speaking opportunities, and transparent assessment. Because the available case materials do not include complete test data, interview transcripts, or a detailed observation schedule, the findings should be treated as context-bound. Future studies should use systematic documentation and reliable performance measures to determine when, for whom, and under what conditions illustrated narratives contribute to language development.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

An AI-assisted writing tool was used to support English-language editing, structural reorganization, and literature mapping. The authors must review all wording, references, interpretations, and declarations and assume full responsibility for the submitted manuscript.

Author Contribution Statement

Author-specific contributions must be confirmed by Ruswanto, Yayan Nurbayan, and Fajar Lediyanto before submission; no individual contribution roles are assigned without their confirmation.

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Data Availability Statement

The original classroom observation records, interview transcripts, and individual test data were not provided for this manuscript revision. Data access and any ethical restrictions must be confirmed by the authors before publication.

Declaration of Interests

The authors must confirm whether any financial, professional, or personal competing interests exist.

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