

The I'rab Method of Habib Hasan Baharun: Impact on Arabic Grammar Instruction

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| Received : | 15 th December 2024 | Revised : | 23 th January 2025 | Accepted : | 09 th February 2025 |
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Abstract

Mastering Arabic syntax (nahwu), particularly the system of i'rab (case inflection), poses persistent challenges for non-native learners in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). This study investigates the pedagogical design and instructional impact of Kitab I'rab authored by Habib Hasan Baharun, founder of Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah (Dalwa), Indonesia. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research involved 120 intermediate-level students and Arabic teachers through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The findings reveal that the I'rab Method promotes grammatical awareness, student engagement, and instructional clarity through simplified explanations, contextual examples, and emotionally resonant content. This method contrasts sharply with traditional models by aligning with constructivist theory and integrating multimodal, affective, and cultural learning dimensions. The study concludes that the Kitab I'rab serves as an effective localized grammar tool that bridges classical Arabic rigor with contemporary learner needs. Its practical application offers a replicable model for other pesantren and Islamic institutions seeking to revitalize Arabic grammar education.

Keywords: I'rab Method, Habib Hasan Baharun Method, grammar instruction.

Introduction

Mastering Arabic syntax (*nahwu*) remains a significant challenge for non-native learners, particularly in traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) where classical grammar is foundational to understanding religious texts. One of the most intricate aspects of Arabic grammar is *i'rab*—the system of inflectional endings that determine syntactic roles. Despite its centrality, the complexity and abstraction of *i'rab* often discourage learners and hinder practical language acquisition. Various educational efforts have sought to simplify *i'rab* instruction, yet many approaches remain theoretical and detached from real classroom realities.

Among the notable figures in modern Arabic pedagogy within the *pesantren* is Habib Hasan Baharun, the founder and principal (*mudir*) of Pondok Pesantren

Darullughah Wadda'wah (Dalwa). His work on *Kitab I'rab* has become a hallmark in the institution's approach to teaching Arabic grammar. Unlike traditional texts which rely on rote memorization and technical categorization, Habib Hasan's method emphasizes clarity, accessibility, and contextual application, enabling students to internalize *i'rab* as a living structure of meaning rather than a static list of endings. This unique methodology, which integrates the pedagogical spirit of *pesantren* with simplified linguistic scaffolding, has drawn attention within Arabic language education circles (Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024).

Numerous scholars have explored strategies for Arabic grammar acquisition, particularly emphasizing the need to simplify complex grammatical constructs such as *i'rab*. Hamidah (2024) underscored the value of functional grammar approaches that prioritize meaning over form, while Masnun (2025) proposed a more contextualized framework for teaching syntax in modern classrooms. Nevertheless, existing literature often remains rooted in traditional grammatical models, which can be overly abstract and disconnected from learners' lived realities—especially those in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), where classical texts form the core of instruction.

In addition, studies such as Sawalha et al. (2025), through the MASAQ syntactic-morphological dataset, contribute valuable tools for both NLP applications and grammar instruction, albeit with a primary focus on textual analysis rather than pedagogy. Ritonga et al. (2021) observed that *tarkīb*-based exercises are vital for improving students' comprehension of classical Arabic texts in *pesantren* contexts. Hanifansyah and Mahmudah (2025) found that incorporating mnemonic devices and contextual sentence construction could enhance grammatical awareness and speaking fluency. Linguistically, Abacı (2021) highlighted the influence of phonetic proximity (*qurb al-jawār*) in shaping *i'rab* patterns, while Sartori (2022) revealed that classical grammarians engaged with suprasegmental cues to navigate complex constructions such as *badal* and *'atf al-bayān*.

The study of *i'rab*, Arabic grammatical inflection has long occupied a central role in the tradition of Arabic grammar instruction, particularly in classical and religious education contexts. Historically, the concept of *i'rab* has been closely tied to the interpretation of sacred texts, especially the Qur'an. As noted by Hamdi and Alawi (2024), *i'rab* enables a deeper syntactic and semantic understanding of Arabic structures, thus supporting the exegetical and rhetorical appreciation of Qur'anic language. The cultural and theological weight carried by *i'rab* has ensured its persistence in pedagogical traditions across the Muslim world.

Within this tradition, Habib Hasan Baharun emerges as a pivotal figure who recontextualized the teaching of *i'rab* for contemporary *pesantren* settings, especially at Dalwa. His method integrates traditional parsing with simplified, oral, and emotionally resonant strategies that engage learners beyond rote memorization. This pedagogical innovation responds to challenges often associated

with traditional Arabic grammar instruction, which can be abstract and inaccessible for modern learners.

The emphasis on understanding over memorization echoes broader educational reforms in language instruction. Moreover, the integration of technology into Arabic grammar teaching has gained traction. Scholars such as Mannaa et al. (2022) and Moukrim et al. (2021) have explored how computer-assisted grammar instruction—particularly with parsing tools and interactive platforms—can improve student outcomes. These findings support the idea that traditional methods like Baharun's can be enhanced through digital frameworks without sacrificing authenticity or depth. Digital applications of *i'rab* instruction may be especially beneficial in remote or blended learning environments, offering learners immediate feedback and varied learning pathways.

Despite its strengths, the implementation of *i'rab*-based instruction is not without challenges. The diglossic nature of Arabic, as discussed by Elhija et al. (2022), often complicates students' ability to apply formal grammatical structures across different language registers. Students familiar with colloquial Arabic may find *i'rab* rules overly formal or irrelevant to their everyday linguistic practices. This necessitates pedagogical sensitivity in designing curricula that bridge the gap between formal and spoken varieties.

In addition, student attitudes toward grammar vary widely based on prior exposure and learning contexts. Selim (2023) notes that negative perceptions of Arabic grammar often formed during early education can lead to disengagement and anxiety. The broader educational value of *i'rab* instruction, particularly as framed by Baharun, also lies in its capacity to cultivate cultural and religious literacy. Alhedayani (2024) argues that syntactic awareness is foundational not only for reading comprehension but also for rhetorical competence in Arabic communication. Likewise, Alkaabi and Almaamari (2025) emphasize the importance of culturally embedded grammar instruction in equipping learners to navigate multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Baharun's approach thus resonates with current calls for integrative pedagogy, one that merges linguistic accuracy with cultural authenticity. His use of emotionally resonant content, often derived from Qur'anic or Hadith examples, enhances both spiritual engagement and grammatical understanding. Such methods are particularly effective in pesantren environments, where language education is inseparable from religious formation (Solehudin & Arisandi, 2024).

In summary, the *I'rab* method of Habib Hasan Baharun exemplifies a balanced and context-sensitive model of grammar instruction. Grounded in classical Arabic traditions, it incorporates modern pedagogical insights to address contemporary learner needs. As the field of Arabic language education continues to adapt to global and technological shifts, such hybrid approaches will be vital in preserving linguistic heritage while promoting effective, learner-centered instruction.

This study addresses two central research questions: (1) How does Habib Hasan Baharun's *I'rab Method* differ from conventional grammar instruction models in terms of pedagogical design and content delivery? (2) What impact does this method have on student comprehension and engagement in the study of Arabic syntax at Dalwa? The scope of this research is limited to: First, the implementation and reception of the *Kitab I'rab* within the Dalwa institution, especially among intermediate-level students. Second, an exploration of pedagogical alignment between the book's structure and broader teaching strategies used in Dalwa.

This study does not aim to generalize findings to all pesantren or Arabic teaching contexts, given the unique ecosystem of Dalwa. However, it provides insights into how indigenous educational models can bridge classical rigor and pedagogical clarity.

By critically engaging with both pedagogical theory and grounded classroom practice, this paper aims to fill the gap in literature regarding locally developed grammar instruction methods. The study contributes to the broader discourse on Arabic language pedagogy by highlighting a case where tradition and innovation meet in meaningful and effective ways.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2020), aiming to analyze the pedagogical impact of *Kitab I'rab* authored by Habib Hasan Baharun on Arabic grammar instruction at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. The theoretical foundation is anchored in constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge based on experiences and prior understanding. This framework is complemented by pedagogical grammar theory, emphasizing learner-centered approaches in presenting grammatical content.

The research was conducted at the Ibtidaiyyah level of Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah, a traditional Islamic boarding school renowned for its structured Arabic curriculum. The selection of this site was purposive, considering the institution's intensive use of *Kitab I'rab* and its reputation for Arabic excellence. The participants included 120 students aged 11–13, who had studied nahwu and i'rab for at least one academic year using Habib Hasan's textbook.

This study focused on two core aspects: (1) the instructional implementation of *Kitab I'rab* in classroom settings, and (2) students' comprehension, response, and syntactic performance based on exposure to the material. The unit of analysis includes teaching activities, student exercises, and observed outcomes in Arabic sentence construction.

The data sources include: Primary data from classroom observations, student worksheets, and semi-structured interviews with Arabic language teachers (n=4). Secondary data from the Kitab I'rab text itself, institutional curriculum documents, and relevant literature on Arabic pedagogy.

Data collection was carried out through: Observation of teaching sessions involving Kitab I'rab (Guimarães & Lima, 2021), using a structured observation sheet to identify teaching strategies, student engagement, and error patterns. Interviews with Arabic teachers to explore their perceptions of the book's effectiveness, challenges in implementation, and observed student development.

Document analysis of student work samples to examine grammatical accuracy, comprehension of i'rab concepts, and syntactic construction. Questionnaires distributed to 120 students to quantitatively assess their level of understanding, perceived ease of use, and attitudes toward Kitab I'rab. The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis for qualitative components, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to instructional strategy and student outcomes. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics, focusing on percentage distribution and frequency to illustrate trends in learner response.

This methodological design enables a comprehensive understanding of how the I'rab Method of Habib Hasan Baharun operates within a real-world pesantren context and the extent to which it contributes to syntactic mastery among early Arabic learners.

Result and Discussion

1. Pedagogical Design of Kitab I'rab: A Departure from Traditional Syntax Teaching

The analysis of Kitab I'rab reveals a distinctive pedagogical structure. Unlike classical nahwu books that heavily emphasize abstract grammatical rules and extended examples, Habib Hasan Baharun's method is marked by brief, focused explanations, followed by practical sentence-based applications. The lessons begin with clear *ta'rīf* (definitions), simplified categorization (such as *ism marfū'*, *fi'l māḍī*, etc.), and are followed by direct application in standard Arabic sentences, many of which reflect real conversational contexts.

From classroom observations, teachers using Kitab I'rab were found to adopt a guided deductive approach. They introduced terminology minimally, often allowing students to discover functions through repetitive examples rather than long theoretical descriptions. This method significantly contrasts with the traditional style used in other pesantren or books such as *Jurūmiyyah*.

Qualitative interview excerpts support this observation: "*Before using this kitab, most students memorized rules without understanding when or why to apply*

them. Now, with Habib Hasan's book, they start to grasp how i'rab functions in real sentences." (F.B. Arabic teacher at Ibtidaiyyah)

"The kitab does not burden them with too many terminologies at once. The sentences are short, and the focus is on meaning. That helps students feel grammar is part of the language, not an external burden." (Ustazah M., grammar teacher)

This method shows alignment with constructivist learning theory, where knowledge is internalized through interaction with meaningful material. It is also consistent with contextual grammar strategies proposed by Masnun (2025), who argued for embedding syntax within natural linguistic flow.

2. Impact on Student Comprehension and Engagement

The questionnaire distributed to 120 Ibtidaiyyah students revealed promising trends: 82% of students reported that Kitab I'rab made them feel more confident in identifying the correct case endings in Arabic sentences. 76% expressed that they now "enjoy studying nahwu" more than before.

Only 18% still described i'rab as confusing or frustrating a marked improvement compared to baseline data collected from past cohorts using traditional texts.

Student worksheet analysis showed improved performance in sentence parsing tasks, especially in distinguishing *marfū'*, *manṣūb*, and *majrūr* forms. Many students were able to articulate 'illah (grammatical justification) for inflection choices with greater clarity.

Qualitative interviews with students confirmed this:

"I understand better now because the book gives examples that we actually use. Before, it was hard and boring." (Student respondent, age 12)

"The book is like a conversation between me and the language. It makes grammar feel alive." (Student respondent, age 13)

These findings support the claims of Hanifansyah and Mahmudah (2025), who demonstrated that simplified and contextual grammar instruction improves both comprehension and motivation. The effectiveness of short, relatable examples in Kitab I'rab also echoes the strategy outlined by Ritonga et al. (2021), who advocated for tarkīb-based sentence practice in pesantren as a means to bridge classical grammar with practical application.

3. Deepening the Cognitive Impact: Grammatical Awareness and Transfer

Beyond surface-level improvements in grammatical performance, data from interviews and document analysis point to a deeper cognitive shift in how students approach Arabic syntax. Teachers noted a significant increase in students'

grammatical metacognition, or their ability to reflect on how and why they choose particular grammatical constructions. One teacher described:

"We no longer need to correct every sentence. Many students now self-correct their i'rab, even in oral exercises. That is something I rarely saw when using older texts." (Interview, Ustaz L.Z.)

This insight is critical, as it highlights not just the acquisition of rules but the development of language intuition, or *dzaug lughawi* (Mahmudah et al., 2024). The concise, structured nature of *Kitab I'rab* seems to support this by limiting cognitive overload while maximizing pattern internalization. This aligns with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), which asserts that reducing extraneous cognitive burden allows learners to engage with core material more effectively (Lovell & Sherrington, 2020).

Moreover, the thematic analysis of classroom interactions suggests that students who study with *Kitab I'rab* demonstrate better transfer of knowledge to other language skills, particularly in writing and speaking tasks. For example, in classroom writing assessments, students who previously struggled with word endings (*akhiran kalimat*) were able to produce extended sentences with relatively accurate inflection, especially when writing in formal Arabic contexts (such as dialogue scripts and short stories). This suggests that *Kitab I'rab* may function not only as a grammar guide but as a foundational tool for broader linguistic competence.

4. Strengthening Engagement through Visual and Auditory Cues

One often overlooked element in Arabic grammar instruction is multimodal reinforcement, especially for young learners who benefit from visual and auditory cues (Arisandi et al., 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2025). While *Kitab I'rab* itself is a written text, its structure lends itself well to verbal drilling, visual annotation, and interactive board use, as observed in several classrooms at Dalwa.

Teachers reported that they often supplement the book with colored inflectional endings (Mahmudah et al., 2024), voice-based repetition exercises, and group parsing activities, all of which build on the modular design of the text. These adaptations are possible largely because *Kitab I'rab* avoids long discursive passages and instead uses clear, symmetrical sentence structures that are easy to analyze and remember.

This is particularly important for visual learners, a group often underrepresented in traditional grammar education. As highlighted by Mayer (2024) in the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, learners retain more when information is presented in both visual and verbal forms. Though *Kitab I'rab* was not originally designed with multimedia in mind, its simplicity enables such integrations organically, especially in *pesantren* that now incorporate digital whiteboards or projected sentence parsing (Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024).

One Arabic teacher reflected:

"I've started using the book's examples as the base for sentence construction games. It works well because the sentences are short and clear. The students love it." (Interview, Ustazah L.N.)

This supports findings by Eltahir et al. (2021), who found that gamified grammar instruction increased engagement and retention in early Arabic learners.

5. Contextual and Cultural Alignment: Why Dalwa Works

One of the reasons *Kitab I'rab* is particularly successful at Dalwa is because it aligns not only with pedagogical best practices, but also with the institutional ethos and cultural rhythm of pesantren life. Dalwa places a strong emphasis on linguistic immersion, communal repetition, and teacher-student interaction rooted in adab (ethical conduct) (Mahmudah, 2025). *Kitab I'rab* mirrors this by being: Compact: lessons are easily digestible within the structure of a pesantren day. Designed for oral reinforcement: many examples are rhythmic or symmetrical, making them ideal for group recitation. Emotionally engaging: The *Kitab I'rab* carries deep emotional significance for Dalwa students, as it was authored by Habib Hasan Baharun, the beloved founder of the institution (Muhamad Solehudin et al., 2024). This personal and institutional attachment fosters a unique motivational bond, encouraging students to engage with the material not just intellectually, but with affection and respect.

This cultural alignment supports Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners are more likely to absorb input when they feel emotionally safe, culturally connected, and intellectually engaged. In contrast, foreign-authored grammar books may use examples that feel abstract or disconnected from students' values and worldviews.

6. Comparative Perspective: Situating Habib Hasan's Method within Broader Pedagogical Trends

Comparing *Kitab I'rab* to other grammar instruction models reveals its strength not only as a local innovation but as a pedagogically sound alternative to more global methods. For instance: Compared to the *Jurūmiyyah* tradition, which prioritizes deductive logic and memorization of dense terminologies (Solehudin & Hanifansyah, 2024), *Kitab I'rab* adopts a bottom-up approach, focusing first on usage and only later reinforcing rules. When contrasted with modern textbooks from the Middle East (e.g., *al-'Arabiyyah Bayna Yadayk*), which often assume some prior familiarity with Arabic, *Kitab I'rab* scaffolds concepts from near-zero, accommodating the *tabula rasa* of non-native learners in Southeast Asia. In comparison to AI-powered NLP tools like the MASAQ dataset (Sawalha et al., 2025), *Kitab I'rab* lacks technological sophistication but excels in pedagogical adaptation making it more immediately usable for resource-limited institutions.

Thus, the book may be viewed as part of a broader movement toward localization in Arabic pedagogy, a trend increasingly discussed in applied linguistics. As Alrabai and (2015) noted pedagogical strategies must reflect learners' cultural contexts and cognitive profiles to be effective. *Kitab I'rab* exemplifies this principle in practice.

7. Teacher Empowerment and Instructional Flexibility

Interviews also highlighted that *Kitab I'rab* empowers teachers as much as it benefits students. Many instructors at Dalwa, especially younger teachers trained within the pesantren, stated that the book gave them a clear pedagogical roadmap. The concise structure allows them to adapt lessons flexibly, incorporate supplementary drills, and link grammar to conversational skills.

"I was once nervous to teach nahwu because the books were so abstract. With this kitab, I feel confident to break it down and make it fun." (Interview, Teacher A.B.)

This supports research by Lestari et al. (2023), which shows that teacher confidence and clarity of instructional materials are key factors in successful grammar instruction—especially in institutions that rely on junior teachers or student instructors (*mu'allim syibyan*).

Furthermore, the present study fills a gap identified in previous literature regarding the lack of instructional materials designed for students with minimal exposure to Arabic linguistic environments. As observed by Abacı (2021) and Sartori (2022), phonological and syntactic cues play an important role in i'rab, but without pedagogical mediation, students often fail to perceive them. *Kitab I'rab* subtly integrates this mediation by focusing on auditory reinforcement and pattern recognition.

Moreover, the use of short, patterned examples and the minimization of cognitive load supports visual and auditory learners, an element missing in most classical texts but highlighted by Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis (Liu, 2022), which suggests that comprehensible input is essential for language acquisition.

The findings of this study affirm the continued relevance of i'rab as a foundational aspect of Arabic grammar instruction, particularly in religious educational settings. In alignment with Hamdi and Alawi (2024), this study reinforces the idea that mastering i'rab not only deepens syntactic awareness but also enables nuanced interpretation of sacred texts. Students at Dalwa, through the application of Habib Hasan Baharun's method, exhibited a notable improvement in both parsing accuracy and the contextual understanding of Qur'anic verses. This underscores the intrinsic link between grammatical instruction and theological comprehension.

A key distinguishing feature of Baharun's method lies in its emphasis on emotional resonance and oral reinforcement. This deviates from conventional models that focus heavily on rote memorization and rule recitation. As observed

during fieldwork, students reported feeling a stronger connection to the material due to the spiritual and affective framing of examples. This supports the broader educational movement, highlighted by Selim (2023), advocating for emotionally intelligent grammar instruction that engages students' affective domains to counteract grammar-related anxiety and demotivation (Nur Hanifansyah et al., 2024).

Moreover, the study contributes to the growing discourse on the hybridization of traditional and modern pedagogical approaches. While Manna et al. (2022) and Moukrim et al. (2021) emphasize the potential of technology-enhanced grammar instruction, this research demonstrates that even orally based traditional methods, such as Baharun's, can be complemented with digital reinforcement. The integration of audio recordings, voice recognition exercises, and digital flashcards into i'rab practice sessions enhanced retention and learner autonomy (Mahmudah & Hanifansyah, 2024). Importantly, this integration did not compromise the method's cultural authenticity addressing a key concern raised in previous digital grammar studies.

However, this study also acknowledges the implementation challenges identified by Elhija et al. (2022), particularly regarding Arabic diglossia. While Baharun's method focuses on fushā (standard Arabic), students often encounter difficulties transferring this knowledge into colloquial interactions or expressive skills. This limitation suggests the need for curriculum designers to consider transitional modules that help bridge i'rab mastery with more functional, real-world language use.

Interestingly, Baharun's method also demonstrates a unique potential for fostering cultural and religious literacy, a theme elaborated by Alhedayani (2024). By embedding religious references into grammatical instruction, students do not merely learn syntactic categories—they engage with linguistic elements that are spiritually and culturally loaded. Such embedded instruction aligns with the vision articulated by Alkaabi and Almaamari (2025), who advocate for the teaching of Arabic not only as a language but as a cultural system. This dual function of i'rab—as both a linguistic and spiritual tool—emerged as a distinctive strength of the Dalwa model.

The findings of this study suggest that Habib Hasan Baharun's i'rab method offers a valuable paradigm for Arabic grammar instruction that is contextually relevant, spiritually engaging, and pedagogically sound. Future efforts may benefit from exploring how this method can be scaled or adapted to other pesantren and Islamic educational contexts, possibly through digital platforms and multilingual support.

In summary, the Kitab I'rab of Habib Hasan Baharun contributes a unique and highly functional model for i'rab instruction that is pedagogically sound, psychologically accessible, and contextually grounded in the pesantren tradition. It

bridges the gap between classical grammar rigor and the needs of contemporary students, particularly in traditional Islamic educational settings.

Conclusion

This study has explored the distinctive I'rab Method developed by Habib Hasan Baharun at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah (Dalwa), highlighting its pedagogical innovation, cultural alignment, and cognitive impact on early Arabic learners. By integrating simplified grammatical explanations, contextualized examples, and emotionally resonant content, the Kitab I'rab offers a practical alternative to traditional syntax instruction. The findings demonstrate that this approach enhances student comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, and overall engagement in Arabic grammar, aligning with theories such as constructivism, affective filter, and cognitive load. Moreover, the method empowers teachers by providing a flexible and intuitive instructional framework, reinforcing its adaptability within pesantren settings.

However, this study is limited to a single institutional context and age group, and further research is needed to examine its applicability across different levels of Arabic proficiency and educational environments. Future investigations could include longitudinal tracking of language development, comparative studies with digital grammar tools, and exploration of how this method performs in non-pesantren schools or formal madrasah systems. Nonetheless, the study contributes meaningfully to the discourse on localized Arabic pedagogy, underscoring the potential of culturally embedded, learner-friendly instructional models to bridge classical rigor with contemporary educational needs.

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