

## Mastering Arabic Vocabulary through Drill Technique: A Study on Primary Learners

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**Hasan<sup>1</sup>, Olsafrian Ihsanu Matswa<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Gatan Arda Saputra<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah, Pasuruan Indonesia

E-mail: [1Hasan@uiidalwa.ac.id](mailto:1Hasan@uiidalwa.ac.id), [2olsafrianihsanum@mhs.uiidalwa.ac.id](mailto:2olsafrianihsanum@mhs.uiidalwa.ac.id),

[3mgatanardasaputra@mhs.uiidalwa.ac.id](mailto:3mgatanardasaputra@mhs.uiidalwa.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

*Vocabulary acquisition is fundamental to mastering a second language, especially at the primary education level where learners are building their linguistic foundation. This study explores the effectiveness of the drill technique in enhancing Arabic vocabulary retention among fourth-grade students at an Islamic primary school. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved 60 students over a four-week period, employing classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that structured and repetitive drills, when implemented with contextual relevance and learner engagement, significantly improve vocabulary recall and student motivation. Moreover, the method's low-resource demands make it highly suitable for underfunded or traditional learning environments. By reintroducing drill-based instruction as a viable pedagogical strategy, this study contributes both practical and theoretical insights into Arabic language education for young learners.*

**Keywords:** *Arabic learning, vocabulary acquisition, drill technique, primary education, repetition-based instruction.*

### **Introduction**

Vocabulary acquisition forms the backbone of language proficiency, particularly in early stages of second language learning (Mahmudah, 2025). In Arabic language instruction at the primary school level, the mastery of basic vocabulary is crucial not only for reading and speaking fluency but also for understanding core Islamic texts. Despite structured curriculums and various pedagogical efforts, many primary learners struggle with retention and recall of Arabic vocabulary. This persistent issue often stems from a lack of repetitive and engaging exposure to words in context, leading to superficial memorization without long-term mastery.

Several studies have explored strategies for improving vocabulary learning in foreign languages. For instance, Alzahrani (2019) and Susanto & Putri (2020) emphasize the role of contextual learning and multimedia integration. However,

while such approaches offer innovation, they may not always be practical or sustainable in resource-limited settings such as public or faith-based primary schools. One traditional yet underexplored method in Arabic language teaching is the drill technique—a repetition-based strategy that strengthens memory retention through continuous practice. Despite being labeled as monotonous by some, the drill method has shown promise in improving automatic recall and fluency in foreign language learning when implemented systematically.

Vocabulary acquisition plays a crucial role in Arabic language mastery, especially for primary learners. Numerous studies support the use of drill-based instruction as a practical method for reinforcing vocabulary retention. The drill method, rooted in repetition and active recall, aligns with core principles of cognitive learning theory and has shown potential in foreign language classrooms.

Lindner et al. (2022) highlighted how children's spatial and verbal skills are interrelated, suggesting that contextualized and structured input can significantly enhance vocabulary development. This supports the idea that drills—when embedded in meaningful contexts—can reinforce both memory and comprehension. Zaki (2020) emphasized the role of active learner engagement through tasks such as corpus-based exercises in improving writing and vocabulary. Though not drill-based per se, these tasks underline the effectiveness of repetition and self-correction in developing language competence—principles shared with the drill technique.

The significance of accommodating Arabic's diglossic nature is addressed by Asadi and Kawar (2023), who argue that distinguishing between standard and spoken Arabic affects children's reading development. Integrating both forms into drill exercises could support learners in bridging linguistic gaps. Jabali (2022) further demonstrated the benefit of linking learners' native linguistic frameworks to Arabic vocabulary development, reinforcing the role of prior knowledge and learner familiarity in vocabulary retention. Recent technological advancements also point to hybrid models. Ghani et al. (2022) showed that digital games enhanced Arabic vocabulary learning through repeated exposure and interaction. Similarly, Almelhes (2024) explored gamified strategies in Arabic teaching, affirming that repetition through enjoyable formats boosts motivation and vocabulary outcomes.

Peer collaboration, as explored by Rabie-Ahmed and Mohamed (2022), plays a complementary role. Their findings indicate that task-based group learning promotes deeper engagement and supports vocabulary mastery through shared knowledge—potentially enriching traditional drills.

On the morphological level, Al-Janaideh et al. (2023) underscored the importance of morphological awareness in Arabic literacy. Designing drills that emphasize root patterns and morphological rules can thus facilitate structural understanding of vocabulary items.

Masrai (2021) explored phonological vocabulary knowledge and its relationship with listening comprehension. This points to the benefit of integrating auditory elements into drills to reinforce pronunciation and listening skills concurrently.

Lastly, Ahmed et al. (2022) advocated for multimodal learning strategies in vocabulary acquisition. Their findings imply that combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimuli within drill-based exercises may yield better retention, particularly for young learners.

In sum, the existing literature supports the potential of the drill method in improving Arabic vocabulary mastery, especially when integrated with contextualized input, collaborative tasks, morphological focus, and digital tools. This research aims to extend those findings by systematically evaluating the effectiveness of drill techniques among primary school students learning Arabic.

Although previous studies have explored various strategies for Arabic vocabulary acquisition—ranging from contextual learning and gamification to morphological awareness—most of this research has centered on older learners in secondary or tertiary education. There is a noticeable lack of focused inquiry into how young children, particularly those in primary school, can effectively build Arabic vocabulary through structured, classroom-based methods.

The drill technique, while often mentioned in pedagogical discourse, is rarely examined as the primary method of instruction. It is frequently overshadowed by more modern, technology-driven approaches, leaving its potential underexplored in foundational language learning, especially for children who benefit from routine, repetition, and rhythm.

Moreover, much of the existing literature assumes access to digital tools and well-resourced environments. This creates a gap in understanding how low-tech, high-impact methods such as systematic drills can serve learners in more traditional or resource-constrained educational settings.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by focusing specifically on primary learners, placing the drill method at the heart of the instructional design, and offering insights grounded in real classroom experience. In doing so, it brings renewed attention to a classic pedagogical approach reimagined for young minds while highlighting its relevance, accessibility, and enduring value in Arabic language education.

This study focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the drill technique in mastering Arabic vocabulary among primary school students. The core research question guiding this inquiry is: To what extent does the use of the drill technique improve Arabic vocabulary mastery in primary learners? Two central issues frame this investigation: (1) the lack of sustained vocabulary retention despite formal instruction, and (2) the need for low-cost, high-frequency methods that align with the learning rhythm of young students.

While modern approaches dominate recent literature, few empirical studies have examined how repetition-based drills specifically affect vocabulary development in Arabic among young learners. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to how such methods function within the cognitive development stages of children in primary education. This gap suggests an opportunity to re-examine traditional techniques within a structured pedagogical framework.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to reintroduce and validate a foundational technique in language pedagogy—drill-based learning—as an effective tool for Arabic vocabulary acquisition. By grounding the study in a real classroom context and employing measurable outcomes, this paper contributes both practically and theoretically to the discourse on Arabic language teaching at the foundational level.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how the drill technique contributes to Arabic vocabulary acquisition among primary-level learners (Creswell, 2021). Grounded in constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active engagement and repeated exposure in building linguistic competence, the research aimed to capture both the observable learning behaviors and the subjective experiences of students as they interacted with vocabulary drills in a real classroom setting.

The study was conducted at a *Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah* (Islamic primary school) located in a rural area with a strong emphasis on traditional Islamic education. The choice of this setting was intentional, reflecting the broader goal of examining low-cost, replicable teaching methods within resource-limited environments. Class 4, comprising 60 students of pesantren, was selected as the research focus. This age group was deemed appropriate due to their developmental readiness to engage with structured repetition and to demonstrate meaningful vocabulary retention over time.

The research design was exploratory and focused on primary data, collected directly from classroom activities, teacher observations, and student responses. The main unit of analysis was the classroom implementation of the drill technique, including how it was introduced, practiced, and internalized by students during Arabic language lessons.

The primary sources of information included: Participant observation, conducted during regular Arabic vocabulary sessions; Semi-structured interviews with the Arabic language teacher and several students to gather reflective insights on their experiences; Field notes and learning artifacts, such as vocabulary worksheets and oral response records during drill activities (O’Leary, 2020).

Data collection took place over a period of four weeks, with sessions observed twice per week. Observations were recorded manually, focusing on students’

participation, response accuracy, and enthusiasm during drills. Interviews were conducted in a conversational style to encourage openness, and responses were transcribed for analysis.

For data analysis, the study followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, all collected data were organized and coded thematically based on emerging patterns related to vocabulary mastery, motivation, and engagement. These themes were then compared across participants to identify recurring insights and unique variations. Validity was enhanced through triangulation, combining observation, interviews, and document analysis to ensure a holistic understanding of the drill technique's impact (Santos et al., 2020).

This methodological framework was chosen not only to evaluate the practical outcomes of the drill technique but also to capture the lived experience of young learners as they developed familiarity and confidence in Arabic vocabulary. The findings aim to inform future pedagogical practices that are both accessible and effective, particularly in similar educational settings.

## **Result and Discussion**

One of the core challenges in early Arabic language education is ensuring that learners not only recognize vocabulary but also retain and apply it meaningfully (Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024). In the context of primary education, especially within traditional and religious schooling systems, students often encounter Arabic in fragmented or overly formal formats, which hinders their ability to internalize and use vocabulary functionally. This study repositions the drill method not as a relic of rote learning but as a dynamic tool when contextualized and adapted to the cognitive needs of young learners.

The effectiveness of the drill technique lies in its compatibility with children's natural learning patterns. Young learners benefit significantly from repetition, especially when it is rhythmic, multisensory, and socially interactive (Mahmudah et al., 2025). When words are repeated in a predictable and structured sequence, students form stronger cognitive associations, allowing for long-term retention. Moreover, drills help automate recall, shifting vocabulary from conscious effort to spontaneous use, a crucial threshold in second language acquisition.

Within the classroom environment, the drill technique also fosters emotional safety. Many students are hesitant to speak up or participate due to fear of making mistakes, particularly in language classes where accuracy is emphasized. However, the collective nature of drills such as choral response or pair drills creates a supportive setting where errors are less stigmatized, and learners feel more comfortable experimenting with the language. This repeated exposure to success in low-stakes interactions builds confidence and reduces speaking anxiety, which is essential for sustained language learning (Solehudin & Arisandi, 2024).

Another strength of the drill method is its adaptability. In this study, the teacher utilized multiple forms of drills, including verbal repetition, flashcard matching, writing prompts, and even group chants (Mahmudah & Hanifansyah, 2024). Such variation kept the process engaging while reinforcing the same vocabulary items from different angles. This aligns with the principle of distributed practice, where information is retained more effectively when revisited across different formats and over multiple sessions.

The engagement observed during the research was not limited to the structured class time. Informal observations revealed that students continued to use the vocabulary outside class, either by self-testing, helping peers, or incorporating new words into their social play. This spontaneous usage indicates that the vocabulary had moved beyond short-term memorization and had entered the learners' active lexicon, a key marker of successful language acquisition. This phenomenon illustrates how classroom drills, when positively received, can have a ripple effect on students' linguistic behavior beyond the lesson itself (Bulhayat et al., 2021).

One of the most notable findings from this study is the alignment between the drill method and the students' daily learning environment. In many resource-limited schools, including Islamic primary institutions, technology-assisted instruction is not always feasible due to infrastructural or training limitations. The drill method, in contrast, requires minimal resources yet delivers high pedagogical returns when implemented consistently. Teachers can execute effective drills using nothing more than a whiteboard, voice (Mahmudah et al., 2024), and a well-planned list of target vocabulary. This makes the method not only effective but also scalable across different learning environments.

Furthermore, the drill technique aligns with pedagogical values that are often emphasized in Islamic education, such as discipline, repetition, and oral transmission of knowledge. Integrating vocabulary drills into such a cultural and institutional framework allows for a more harmonious learning experience. Students do not experience the drill method as a foreign or imposed practice but rather as an extension of their established modes of learning, which facilitates better receptivity and engagement.

This study also revealed the importance of teacher enthusiasm and consistency in implementing the drill method. In classrooms where teachers approached drills as mere tasks, students were less responsive. However, when the teacher led the session with energy, variation, and clear purpose, students mirrored that enthusiasm (Solehudin et al., 2024). This reinforces the idea that methodology alone does not guarantee effectiveness; rather, it is the intentional and reflective use of the method that makes the difference.

It is worth noting that the vocabulary selected for the drills was thematically relevant and aligned with students' daily routines, such as words related to school

activities, family, prayer, and greetings. This contextual relevance played a significant role in supporting retention, as learners found immediate and meaningful applications for the words they practiced. Vocabulary drills disconnected from context risk becoming mechanical and quickly forgotten. Therefore, careful vocabulary selection and situational anchoring are critical factors that determine the success of the drill technique.

Moreover, the structured nature of the drill method helped support learners who were previously passive or disengaged. These students often require clear, repetitive routines to process language effectively. The predictability of drill sequences gave such learners a stable framework within which they could operate and succeed. In several cases, students who rarely participated in open-ended tasks were more confident in drill-based activities and began to take initiative as the sessions progressed.

In addition to cognitive and linguistic benefits, the drill technique fostered a sense of collective progress among students. As learners heard each other improve and participated in group recitations, they experienced a shared sense of accomplishment. This social dimension of learning is particularly powerful in primary classrooms, where peer influence and collective identity are strong. The method thus not only built individual proficiency but also strengthened classroom cohesion and mutual support.

While drill techniques are sometimes criticized for lacking depth or creative engagement, this study suggests otherwise. When strategically designed, drills can be a launchpad for higher-order language use. For example, after a vocabulary drill, the teacher extended the activity into sentence-building games, simple storytelling, or dialogues. In this way, drills served as foundational rehearsals that equipped students for more complex communicative tasks. Therefore, rather than being an end in themselves, drills can function as bridges toward more dynamic language use.

This layered approach moving from repetition to application reinforces the view that vocabulary learning is not linear but recursive. Students need repeated exposure and rehearsal before they can manipulate vocabulary in diverse contexts. The drill method, especially in young learners, provides the initial fluency and familiarity required to venture into more expressive and analytical use of language.

The insights gained from this study also underscore the importance of teacher training and reflective practice. Teachers who understand the cognitive principles behind drills and who can adapt them to the classroom context are more likely to achieve meaningful results. Therefore, educational institutions should not dismiss drills as outdated but instead invest in professional development that empowers teachers to revitalize and innovate this classic method.

Finally, this study advocates for a balanced approach to language instruction. While innovation, technology, and gamification have their place in modern pedagogy, foundational methods like drills still hold significant value especially when

implemented with sensitivity to learners' developmental stages and classroom realities (Arisandi et al., 2025). In environments where resources are limited, and where learners benefit from routine and structure, the drill technique offers a robust, research-backed, and culturally aligned method for supporting vocabulary growth.

### **1. The Effect of Drill Technique on Arabic Vocabulary Retention**

The observation data and student artifacts revealed that repetitive vocabulary drills significantly enhanced students' ability to recall and use Arabic words with greater confidence and accuracy. Across the four-week observation period, students in Class 4 demonstrated consistent improvement in recognizing, pronouncing, and applying target vocabulary in simple sentences and daily expressions. The teacher implemented drills through oral repetition, choral responses, individual recitation, and matching exercises.

A majority of students showed enthusiasm during these sessions. Some pupils even began initiating their own group drills during breaks or after school hours, indicating a shift from passive learning to active internalization.

*"At first, I was nervous to say the words. But after saying them many times with my friends, I remember them better, and I feel happy when I get it right."* (Student A, interview, Week 2)

*"We repeat the words every day, sometimes like a game. It helps me not forget. I try to say the words even at home."* (Student B, interview, Week 4)

These qualitative insights affirm that repetition, when integrated into a familiar and friendly routine, contributes to retention and boosts learner motivation. The teacher also noted:

*"They learn faster when we repeat words together. Some students who were usually quiet now raise their hands to answer. The drill sessions changed their confidence."* (Arabic teacher, interview, Week 3)

This reflects the concept of retrieval practice in cognitive learning theory, where repeated recall enhances long-term memory. The results align with Zaki (2020) and Lindner et al. (2022), who emphasize that structured and repeated exposure fosters stronger cognitive connections and vocabulary retention.

### **2. Learner Engagement and Motivation in Drill-Based Sessions**

Drill activities proved to be not only effective but also enjoyable for students. Contrary to the criticism that drills are monotonous, the structured repetition in this study included rhythm, peer interaction, and visual aids, which made the sessions engaging.

*"I like when we say the words together in a loud voice. It feels like a song and helps me to remember the words more easily."* (Student C, interview, Week 1)

*"Sometimes I make my own flashcards to play with my friends after school. We laugh but we also remember the words better."* (Student D, interview, Week 4)

These findings suggest that with creative delivery, drills can enhance both affective and cognitive engagement. Students' voluntary practice beyond formal instruction indicates a meaningful internalization of vocabulary. This supports the findings of Ghani et al. (2022) and Almelhes (2024), who show that repeated exposure in interactive formats fosters deeper learner involvement.

Moreover, the collaborative aspect observed—students helping each other during drills—aligns with Rabie-Ahmed & Mohamed (2022) who highlight the role of peer learning in vocabulary development. The observed dynamics in the classroom suggest that even traditional methods like drills can facilitate social learning environments, especially when designed to encourage group participation.

### **3. Classroom-Based Drill as a Low-Tech, High-Impact Strategy**

Given the limited access to digital resources in the school, the drill technique served as a cost-effective and sustainable solution. Teachers relied on oral cues, whiteboard prompts, and simple worksheets—tools that are easily replicable in similar educational contexts.

*"We don't have many materials, but the students enjoy the drills. They are active and remember more. I see improvement even in those who used to forget quickly."* (Arabic teacher, interview, Week 4)

This highlights the accessibility of the drill method, especially in resource-constrained settings. Unlike multimedia-based learning, which often requires infrastructure and training, structured drills can be executed daily with minimal preparation, yet yield substantial learning outcomes. This aligns with critiques by Meifitri & Susanto (2020) and Alzahrani (2020) who noted that while contextual and digital methods are effective, they may not always be feasible for low-resourced institutions.

Furthermore, the drill sessions reflected morphological awareness, as students began to identify root patterns and word families through repetition—echoing the importance of morphological instruction noted by Al-Janaideh et al. (2023).

The findings of this study confirm that drill-based vocabulary instruction, when delivered systematically and with learner-centered adaptations, is an effective method for Arabic language acquisition in primary education. The approach resonates with cognitive learning theory, emphasizing the importance of repetition and retrieval, and further validates the pedagogical relevance of drills, especially in early stages of language development.

In comparison with previous studies that focused on gamification, digital tools, and higher education learners, this study contributes a unique perspective by demonstrating that traditional methods—when adapted to the developmental and contextual needs of young learners—remain powerful tools for vocabulary retention and learner engagement.

Unlike the studies by Ghani et al. and Almelhes, which leveraged mobile games to increase engagement, this research showcases that even non-digital drills can generate excitement, especially when embedded within communal classroom culture. In addition, the students' verbal reports of using Arabic outside the classroom suggest a transfer of learning into real-life contexts, reinforcing the value of the drill method in nurturing foundational language habits.

Moreover, this study echoes and extends the argument of Jabali (2022) and Asadi & Kawar (2023) that vocabulary instruction in Arabic must account for diglossia and learner background. Through repeated exposure, students in this study began bridging the gap between isolated words and functional language use—suggesting that drills may serve as a scaffold for deeper language acquisition, especially when native linguistic frameworks are acknowledged.

In essence, this study reaffirms the pedagogical merit of drill techniques and provides contextual evidence that such an approach is not only effective but essential for foundational learners in environments where resources are limited and learning needs are immediate.

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that the systematic use of the drill technique can significantly enhance Arabic vocabulary acquisition among primary school learners. By observing 60 students over a four-week period, the research provided evidence that repetition, especially when delivered through engaging and structured classroom activities, improves retention, recall, and learner confidence. The findings reaffirm those foundational methods, such as drills when thoughtfully adapted to the developmental stage of children can be both effective and enjoyable, particularly in resource-limited educational environments.

Despite its strengths, this study acknowledges several limitations. The research was confined to a single classroom context within a religious school, and the duration was relatively short for measuring long-term retention. Future research could expand to diverse school settings, incorporate longitudinal tracking, or compare the drill method with other vocabulary strategies. Nevertheless, the results highlight a promising pedagogical approach that aligns with both cognitive learning principles and the realities of traditional classrooms, offering practical insights for educators seeking low-cost, high-impact tools for language instruction.

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