Innovative Approaches to Teaching Arabic Vocabulary to Novice Learners

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Abstract

In Islamic boarding schools such as Darullughah Wadda'wah, novice Arabic learners are expected to acquire basic conversational skills within their first three months—an intensive demand that often leads to anxiety and limited vocabulary retention when traditional rote methods are applied. This study explores innovative approaches to enhance Arabic vocabulary acquisition among beginner-level students through gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from 120 first-year students aged 12–16 through classroom observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The findings reveal that integrating interactive and mnemonic-based strategies significantly improved student engagement, motivation, and vocabulary recall. Mnemonic storytelling and contextualized learning tasks allowed learners to associate words with meaningful experiences, thereby reducing cognitive load and enhancing language use in real-life situations. Despite challenges related to classroom management and technological adaptation, the study demonstrates that a balanced integration of traditional and innovative methods can transform vocabulary learning into an engaging and effective process. This research contributes a practical, learner-centered model for Arabic language instruction within immersive educational environments.

Keywords: *Innovative Arabic Vocabulary Teaching, Approaches Arabic Vocabulary Teaching, Arabic Vocabulary Novice Learners.*

Introduction

The mastery of vocabulary is a fundamental component in second language

acquisition, particularly for Arabic as a foreign language. Despite its importance, many novice learners struggle with Arabic vocabulary retention due to its unique root-based morphology, diglossic nature, and distinct phonetic system. Traditional rote memorization methods often prove ineffective, leading to limited long-term retention and disengagement among learners[1].

Ramadani and Baroroh (2021) categorized Arabic vocabulary strategies according to student levels, suggesting mim-mem and singing for beginners[2], TPR and demonstration for intermediates, and reading and cognitive approaches for advanced learners. However, their work remains theoretical and lacks integration of modern, learner-centered innovations. Hanifansyah et al. (2024) introduced mnemonic storytelling as a psycholinguistic approach to improve Arabic writing. Although focused on writin[3]g, their findings—improved grammar retention, vocabulary acquisition, and creativity—highlight the value of mnemonic-based and contextual methods for language learning.

Solehudin et al. (2024) examined the use of *Kitab Muhawarah*, a dialogue-based textbook, to enhance Arabic speaking proficiency among Malaysian students. Their study showed notable improvements in fluency, confidence, and vocabulary usage, emphasizing the effectiveness of conversational and contextual learning tools in fostering real-life communication skills[4].

While previous studies have contributed valuable insights into vocabulary learning strategies, storytelling techniques, and dialogue-based instruction, they often focus on specific skills or theoretical approaches without fully integrating technology-enhanced, interactive, and multimodal methods tailored to novice learners. Moreover, most existing research does not holistically address the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of vocabulary acquisition in immersive Islamic boarding school contexts.

This study fills that gap by combining gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input to create an engaging, learner-centered environment for Arabic

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[1] Moh. Tohiri Habib et al., 'Podcasts as an Innovative Solution for Teaching Arabic: Enhancing Speaking and Listening Skills.', *Studi Arab, Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan* 15, no. 2 (2024): 87–105, https://doi.org/10.35891/sa.v15i2.5784.

[2] Febry Ramadani S and R Umi Baroroh, 'Strategies And Methods Of Learning Arabic Vocabulary/ Strategi Dan Metode Pembelajaran Kosakata Bahasa Arab', *Ijaz Arabi Journal of Arabic Learning* 3, no. 2 (4 August 2020), https://doi.org/10.18860/ijazarabi.v3i2.10062.

[3] 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 (25 December 2024): 31–52, https://doi.org/10.56874/ej.v5i2.2029.

[4] Muhamad Solehudin, Nurhanifansyah Nurhanifansyah, and Syaheed Kholid, 'The Effectiveness of Using the Kitab Muhawarah in Enhancing Arabic Speaking Proficiency in Malaysia', *An Nabighoh* 26, no. 2 (3 December 2024): 251–68, https://doi.org/10.32332/an-nabighoh.v26i2.251-268.

vocabulary acquisition. Unlike earlier works, it emphasizes not only vocabulary retention but also learner motivation, confidence, and classroom dynamics—offering a more comprehensive and practical model suited for the 21st-century language classroom.

This study aims to explore and evaluate innovative approaches that can enhance Arabic vocabulary learning for beginners. The research focuses on modern methodologies, including: Gamification and Interactive Learning: The use of digital applications and educational games. Task-Based Learning (TBL): Engaging learners in real-world tasks to reinforce vocabulary usage. Multimodal Input: The integration of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning strategies.

What are the most effective innovative strategies for teaching Arabic vocabulary to novice learners? How do interactive and multimodal techniques impact vocabulary retention compared to traditional methods? What challenges and limitations arise in implementing these approaches in Arabic language instruction?

This study focuses on first-year students at Darullughah Wadda'wah, a well-established Islamic boarding school known for its Arabic language instruction. The diverse linguistic backgrounds of the students create an interesting case for evaluating effective teaching strategies tailored to novice learners with different levels of exposure to Arabic.

This research contributes to the field by bridging the gap between traditional pedagogy and contemporary, technology-enhanced learning strategies. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on rote memorization and conventional classroom techniques, this study highlights innovative, learner-centered approaches that improve engagement, retention, and application of Arabic vocabulary.

By identifying and evaluating these strategies, this research provides practical insights for educators, curriculum designers, and language learners, ensuring more effective and enjoyable Arabic vocabulary learning experiences.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design, focusing on the vocabulary acquisition experiences of 120 novice Arabic learners at Darullughah Wadda'wah[5]. The research aims to explore the effectiveness of innovative teaching

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[5] John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2020).

strategies, particularly gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input, within the unique setting of an Islamic boarding school. This setting provides an immersive Arabic environment, making it an ideal case for examining the impact of contemporary pedagogical methods compared to conventional rote memorization techniques.

The study is grounded in several key theories, including Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning, Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982)[6], which highlights the necessity of comprehensible input for vocabulary acquisition, and Multimodal Learning Theory, which supports the integration of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. These theories collectively provide a framework for analyzing how interactive and technology-enhanced vocabulary instruction can improve engagement and retention among novice Arabic learners.

The research was conducted at Darullughah Wadda'wah, with participants comprising 120 new students aged between 12 and 16 years. These students were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that all participants were at the beginner level of Arabic proficiency. The variation in age and prior language exposure adds depth to the study, allowing for an analysis of how different learners respond to innovative teaching strategies.

Data collection involved multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the learning experience. Classroom observations were conducted to document student engagement and interaction during lessons that incorporated gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input. Semi-structured interviews were held with students and Arabic teachers to explore their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the teaching methods. Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) provided collective insights into students' preferred learning strategies. To assess vocabulary retention and practical usage, students' reflections and written tasks were also analyzed. Secondary data sources included Arabic language textbooks and existing literature on vocabulary acquisition in Arabic education.

For data analysis, the study applied thematic analysis[7], following a structured process. First, all collected data, including observation notes, interview transcripts, and student

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[6] Francis Bailey and Ahmed Kadhum Fahad, 'Krashen Revisited: Case Study of the Role of Input, Motivation and Identity in Second Language Learning', *Arab World English Journal* 12, no. 2 (15 June 2021): 540–50, https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no2.36.

[7] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

reflections, were reviewed thoroughly [8]. Next, initial coding was conducted to identify recurring themes related to vocabulary learning effectiveness. These codes were then categorized into broader themes, such as engagement levels, retention rates, and learning difficulties. Finally, the findings were interpreted in relation to existing theories and previous research to draw meaningful conclusions.

To ensure ethical research practices, all participants provided informed consent before participating in interviews and FGDs[9]. The study maintained anonymity and confidentiality of student data, and ethical approval was obtained from the Darullughah Wadda'wah research committee before data collection commenced. These measures were taken to protect the rights and privacy of all participants, ensuring the credibility and integrity of the research.

Result and Discussion

At Darullughah Wadda'wah, first-year students—commonly referred to as *santri baru*—are required to acquire functional Arabic conversational skills within the first three months of their stay. This institutional expectation aims to establish a foundation for immersive language use across daily interactions, prayers, academic discussions, and peer communication[10]. However, many of these students arrive with little to no prior exposure to Arabic, creating a significant initial gap in vocabulary mastery and speaking confidence[11]. The pressure to quickly memorize common expressions often leads to stress and disengagement, especially when traditional rote methods dominate classroom practices[12].

Observations during the study revealed that students responded more positively when vocabulary was embedded within meaningful, emotionally resonant contexts—

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[8] 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): 1358–67, https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1441; 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), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315630243.

[9] Primadi Candra Susanto et al., 'Qualitative Method Concepts: Literature Review, Focus Group Discussion, Ethnography and Grounded Theory', *Siber Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary* 2, no. 2 (3 September 2024): 262–75, https://doi.org/10.38035/sjam.v2i2.207.

[10] 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 (20 October 2024): 26–43, https://doi.org/10.38073/lahjatuna.v4i1.2181.

[11] Muhamad Solehudin and Nur Hanifansyah, 'Arabic Public Speaking in Malaysia: Enhancing Vocabulary and Confidence through Psycholinguistics', *International Journal of Arabic Language Teaching* 6, no. 02 (22 December 2024): 143–56, https://doi.org/10.32332/ijalt.v6i02.9920.

[12] Muhamad Solehudin, Nur Hanifansyah, and Iqbal Fathi Izzuddin, 'Enhancing Arabic Listening and Vocabulary Acquisition through AI-Powered Music: A Study on Suno AI', *Arabiyat : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Dan Kebahasaaraban* 11, no. 2 (2024): 175–88, https://doi.org/10.15408/a.v11i2.41994.

such as through mnemonic storytelling or dramatized dialogues[13]. When learners were guided to associate new words with memorable narratives or linked them to personal experiences, they retained the terms more effectively and were more willing to use them in real-life conversations. For example, one teacher employed a mnemonic strategy by associating the word "مِفْتَاح" (key) with the phrase *"Miftah opens the treasure of knowledge"*, which students later recalled spontaneously during peer interactions. This supports findings from Hanifansyah et al. (2024), who emphasized the power of storytelling in enhancing vocabulary retention and creative language application.

Moreover, the pressure of the three-month conversational target created a natural environment for task-based learning, as students engaged in practical speaking tasks such as asking for permission, introducing themselves, or giving directions. These tasks became more effective when supported by visual cues, motion, and repetition—aligning with the principles of multimodal learning. The incorporation of mnemonic techniques[14], both verbal and visual, played a crucial role in reducing anxiety and strengthening long-term recall. These findings underscore the need for structured, student-friendly vocabulary strategies that acknowledge both the cognitive load of beginners and the institutional language demands of pesantren life[15].

The Effectiveness of Innovative Teaching Strategies on Vocabulary Retention

The findings of this study indicate that gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input significantly enhanced vocabulary retention among novice learners. Classroom observations showed that students who engaged in gamified activities, such as digital flashcards and interactive quizzes, demonstrated higher recall rates and active participation compared to those exposed to traditional rote memorization. Similarly, students involved in task-based learning, where vocabulary was introduced through real-world tasks (e.g., role-playing conversations, problem-solving activities), exhibited

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[13] Nur Hanifansyah and Menik Mahmudah, 'Enhancing Arabic Vocabulary Mastery Through Communicative Strategies: Evidence from Malaysia.', *Al-Ta'rib : Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab IAIN* 12, no. (2) (2024): 263–78, https://doi.org/10.23971/altarib.v12i2.9082.

[14] 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): 804–26, https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.11349.

[15] 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): 165–84, http://dx.doi.org/10.31958/lughawiyah.v6i2.13456.

a stronger ability to use newly acquired words in context.

Qualitative data from student interviews further reinforce these findings. One student (aged 14) stated, "When we played vocabulary games, I could remember words more easily, and I didn't feel stressed about memorizing." Another student (aged 15) shared, "Using pictures and videos made the words stick in my mind. I feel more confident using Arabic in daily conversations." These statements align with Multimodal Learning Theory[16], which suggests that integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic input improves language retention by engaging multiple cognitive pathways.

Vocabulary Internalization through Contextualized Learnin

The qualitative data further affirm that students not only memorized vocabulary more effectively through interactive methods but also began to internalize the meanings of words as part of their communicative identity. Several teachers observed a notable shift in students' classroom behavior—from passive memorization to active usage—when lessons incorporated competitive games, real-life scenarios, and mnemonic devices. One student, for instance, confidently used newly learned vocabulary during dormitory conversations, stating, "I remember the word because we used it in a story and acted it out." This indicates that when vocabulary is acquired through emotionally charged, contextualized experiences, students are more likely to retrieve and apply it spontaneously beyond formal settings.

Moreover, the combination of visual aids, body movement, sound associations, and peer collaboration stimulated multiple cognitive pathways, allowing for deeper and more durable language acquisition. This supports Multimodal Learning Theory and underscores the significance of designing Arabic vocabulary lessons that go beyond text-based instruction. In this study, innovation did not mean abandoning traditional methods entirely, but rather enhancing them with meaningful input and psycholinguistic strategies that respect the learners' developmental stages and cultural environment. The positive transformation seen in these novice learners demonstrates the potential of scalable, context-sensitive methods for Arabic language instruction across similar institutions.

Peer Dynamics and Emotional Resonance in Vocabulary Mastery

The qualitative findings of this study highlight that vocabulary mastery among

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[16] I Wayan Eka Dian Rahmanu and Gyöngyvér Molnár, 'Multimodal Immersion in English Language Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Review', *Heliyon* 10, no. 19 (October 2024): e38357, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38357.

novice learners was significantly influenced by the emotional and social dimensions of the learning process. When students engaged in collaborative activities—such as pair work, peer tutoring, and role-playing—they not only retained vocabulary more effectively but also began to internalize the words through emotionally resonant interactions. Teachers noted that students who shared laughter, competitive energy, or empathetic storytelling during vocabulary practice tended to recall and reuse the words more spontaneously.

One illustrative case involved students practicing the word "مِفْتَاح" (key) within a group mnemonic story—*"Miftah opens the treasure of knowledge"*—which became an inside joke among peers. This emotional association turned the word into a shared reference point, reinforcing both memory and social bonding. Such experiences validate Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, emphasizing that language acquisition is not only cognitive but also deeply social and emotional.

Moreover, emotionally meaningful contexts—such as storytelling, physical dramatization, or peer dialogue—created low-anxiety environments where learners felt safe to experiment with language. These dynamics were especially evident in dormitory conversations, where students began applying vocabulary learned in class to real-life interactions. The integration of mnemonic techniques, combined with peer support and positive affect, catalyzed a deeper, more personal connection to the language—marking a shift from passive memorization to active and confident language use.

Student Engagement and Learning Motivation

Observations also revealed that students who participated in interactive and gamified learning showed higher engagement levels compared to those in conventional classroom settings[17]. Teachers noted that students were more enthusiastic and proactive in class when learning vocabulary through competitive games, group discussions, and role-playing. This was particularly evident among younger students (ages 12–13), who responded positively to visual and interactive stimuli.

Interviews with teachers supported this finding. One Arabic teacher mentioned, "Students tend to disengage when they are required to memorize word lists without context. However, when we integrate activities such as storytelling or vocabulary-based games, they become more eager to participate." Another teacher added, "The students

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[17] Ummi Syarah Ismail et al., 'A Model Framework for the Implementation of Gamification in Arabic Teaching in Malaysia', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 13, no. 11 (1 November 2023): 2800–2805, https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1311.09.

who learn through movement-based activities, such as acting out words or using hand gestures, tend to retain vocabulary longer."

These observations align with Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)[18], which emphasizes that social interaction plays a critical role in language acquisition. By engaging in group-based and contextualized learning activities, students naturally absorb and internalize new vocabulary through meaningful interaction[19].

Challenges and Limitations in Implementing Innovative Approaches

Despite the overall success of gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal approaches, several challenges were observed. Some students, particularly those aged 15–16, initially found game-based learning to be childish and preferred structured lessons with clear explanations. Furthermore, some students from non-digital backgrounds struggled to adapt to technology-based learning tools, indicating a need for gradual integration of digital resources.

Teachers also faced challenges in classroom management when implementing interactive activities, as students occasionally became overly excited, leading to disruptions in class discipline. One teacher reported, "Gamification keeps students engaged, but sometimes they get too competitive, and it takes time to bring the focus back to learning."

To address these issues, teachers gradually balanced traditional instruction with innovative strategies, ensuring that students benefited from structured vocabulary learning while maintaining engagement through interactive methods.

The findings of this study support Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes that comprehensible and engaging input is key to vocabulary acquisition. Students who received input through multimodal means—such as images, videos, and interactive tasks—showed higher retention rates than those exposed to text-based memorization. This aligns with the work of Schmitt (2017), who argued that mnemonic techniques and contextual learning enhance long-term retention in second language vocabulary learning.

Moreover, the results confirm the conclusions of Alqahtani (2015), who

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[18] Mahan Yaghoubi and Parisa Farrokh, 'Investigating Iranian English Learners' Private Speech Across Proficiency Levels and Gender Based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory', *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 51, no. 2 (April 2022): 273–92, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-022-09838-y.
[19] Menik Mahmudah, 'Enhancing Arabic Vocabulary with Hilyah Book', *Al-Muhawaroh: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.38073/almuhawaroh.v1i1.2427.

highlighted the importance of context-based vocabulary learning. In this study, students who learned vocabulary within meaningful contexts, such as storytelling and real-life dialogues, demonstrated better recall and usage than those who memorized isolated words. This suggests that Arabic vocabulary instruction should prioritize contextualized learning rather than reliance on traditional rote learning.

Additionally, the study highlights a gap in previous research regarding the adaptation of innovative methods for students of different age groups. While younger learners benefited the most from game-based and interactive methods, older students preferred structured instruction with contextual applications. This suggests that a differentiated instructional approach is necessary, where methods are tailored according to students' cognitive preferences and learning styles.

The results of this study underscore the effectiveness of gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input in enhancing Arabic vocabulary retention among novice learners. Students demonstrated higher engagement, motivation, and recall when exposed to interactive and contextual learning activities. However, challenges such as classroom management issues and varying student preferences indicate that a balanced approach—combining traditional instruction with modern methodologies—is necessary for optimal learning outcomes.

Future research should explore longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of innovative vocabulary teaching strategies and investigate how individual learner differences influence the effectiveness of these approaches. Additionally, further studies could focus on integrating AI-driven personalized learning systems to cater to different student preferences in Arabic language acquisition.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that innovative instructional approaches—namely gamification, task-based learning, and multimodal input—significantly enhance Arabic vocabulary acquisition among novice learners in immersive Islamic boarding school settings. The integration of mnemonic storytelling, real-life tasks, and collaborative learning not only improved vocabulary retention but also fostered greater engagement, motivation, and emotional connection to the language. Findings revealed that vocabulary learning is most effective when students are immersed in contextualized, socially interactive environments that stimulate multiple cognitive pathways. Rather than relying solely on rote memorization, learners benefited from psycholinguistic

strategies that honored their developmental stages and diverse learning preferences.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of balancing traditional pedagogical methods with modern, learner-centered innovations. Although challenges such as classroom management and digital adaptation persist, these can be mitigated through thoughtful instructional design and gradual integration of interactive tools. Ultimately, this research contributes a practical model for Arabic vocabulary instruction that is both culturally sensitive and pedagogically forward-thinking. It offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and educational institutions seeking to transform vocabulary learning into a more engaging, effective, and sustainable process for novice Arabic learners.

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