



The Role of Teachers as Learning Designers in Enhancing Students' Interest for Reading Arabic Texts

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Arabic language teachers as learning designers in enhancing students' interest in reading Arabic texts among Grade XII students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan. Although Arabic reading competence is central to Islamic education, many students still lack motivation to engage with authentic texts. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis to explore how teachers design learning activities that motivate students. The findings reveal that teacher-designed strategies such as contextual text selection, scaffolded reading tasks, interactive discussions, and integration of technology significantly increase students' engagement and willingness to read Arabic. These practices also promote positive attitudes toward Arabic literacy and encourage independent learning. The study concludes that teacher agency in instructional design is a key determinant of students' reading interest. The implications emphasize the need for professional development focused on learning design, so teachers can create motivating, student-centered reading environments that strengthen Arabic literacy in Islamic educational institutions.

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Introduction

Arabic language education occupies a central position in Islamic schooling because it enables students to access religious texts, classical scholarship, and contemporary academic discourse. Among the four language skills, reading competence plays a particularly important role, as it allows students to interpret, evaluate, and construct meaning from Arabic texts. However, research in Arabic language pedagogy indicates that students' interest in reading Arabic texts remains limited, particularly when instruction relies heavily on teacher-centered methods and grammar-translation approaches (Alrabai, 2018; Althaqafi, 2021). Low reading interest often results in superficial engagement with texts, limited vocabulary acquisition, and weak comprehension skills. This condition presents a challenge for Arabic language education in Islamic secondary schools such as Madrasah Aliyah, where students are expected to interact meaningfully with Arabic texts for both academic and religious purposes.

In response to these challenges, recent educational research has emphasized the importance of re-conceptualizing the role of teachers. Rather than serving merely as transmitters of knowledge, teachers are increasingly viewed as learning designers, responsible for planning, structuring, and orchestrating learning environments that enhance student engagement and motivation (Laurillard, 2019). Learning design



involves deliberate decisions about learning objectives, activities, materials, assessment, and sequencing all of which influence students' willingness to engage with reading tasks. When teachers design meaningful and student-centered learning experiences, students demonstrate greater persistence, curiosity, and interest in reading (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Interest and motivation are recognized as key predictors of reading engagement and achievement. Studies show that students who perceive reading tasks as relevant, enjoyable, and purposeful are more likely to sustain attention and actively construct meaning from texts (Schiefele et al., 2016). Conversely, when instruction emphasizes rote memorization or decontextualized translation, students frequently experience anxiety, low confidence, and declining interest (Alamer & Lee, 2019). These dynamics are also evident in Arabic language learning, where pedagogical innovation is essential to foster intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes toward reading (Rashid & Yunus, 2023).

Teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' reading experiences. As learning designers, Arabic language teachers are expected to select creative learning models, integrate authentic texts, promote student interaction, and scaffold comprehension. Recent studies indicate that innovative pedagogical approaches such as student-centered learning, inquiry-based reading, and technology-supported instruction have a positive impact on students' reading interest and engagement (Klimova, 2019; Yunus et al., 2021). These approaches reposition students as active participants who construct meaning rather than passive recipients of instruction.

In the Indonesian context, Madrasah Aliyah students are exposed to Arabic not only as a school subject but as a gateway to religious literacy. Nevertheless, classroom observation in various Islamic schools suggests that many students still struggle to develop a genuine interest in reading Arabic texts. Some students rely primarily on translation without understanding meaning deeply, while others become disengaged when reading instruction lacks creativity and interaction (Ningsih & Hakim, 2022). These conditions highlight the need to better understand how Arabic language teachers design learning environments that encourage students to read willingly and enthusiastically.

Although previous research has examined motivation, attitudes, and instructional strategies in Arabic language learning, relatively few studies have specifically focused on the role of Arabic language teachers as learning designers in promoting reading interest in senior Islamic secondary schools. Limited attention has been given to the experiences of students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan, where Arabic reading competence is expected to support both academic and spiritual development. Understanding how teachers design reading instruction in this setting is therefore important for strengthening pedagogical practice and improving students' engagement with Arabic texts.

The present study explores how Arabic language teachers function as learning designers in enhancing students' interest in reading Arabic texts among Grade XII students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan. The study seeks to examine how learning is



planned, organized, and implemented, as well as how these instructional design practices influence students' interest in reading. So, the objective of this study is to analyze the role of Arabic language teachers as learning designers in enhancing students' interest in reading Arabic texts among Grade XII students of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan.

Method

This study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan, an Islamic senior secondary school in Indonesia where Arabic is a compulsory subject. The participants consisted of Grade XII students enrolled in Arabic language classes, along with the Arabic language teachers responsible for reading instruction. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those involved had direct experience with Arabic reading activities and instructional design processes (Etikan, 2016). Inclusion criteria required that students had studied Arabic for at least three years and were currently engaged in text-based Arabic learning. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining institutional permission and informed consent from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing participant identities. This approach is consistent with ethical standards commonly applied in qualitative educational research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how Arabic language teachers function as learning designers in enhancing students' interest in reading Arabic texts. Qualitative design was selected because it allows in-depth exploration of teacher practices, perceptions, and contextual classroom processes that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone (Given, 2017). Data were collected through three primary instruments: semi-structured interviews with Arabic language teachers, classroom observations focusing on reading-related learning activities, and student questionnaires measuring perceived reading interest. The interview protocol examined lesson planning, instructional strategies, material selection, and teacher reflections on student engagement. Observation guidelines documented interaction patterns, teacher facilitation, and student participation. The student questionnaire drew on previous validated reading motivation frameworks and was adapted contextually for Arabic learning (Toste et al., 2020). Instruments were reviewed by two language pedagogy experts to ensure content validity.

Data collection was conducted over one academic term. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, while observation notes were recorded systematically following each lesson. Questionnaire data were collected anonymously during class time. To ensure dependability and confirmability, data were triangulated across sources (teachers, students, and observations) and methods (interview, questionnaire, observation) (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data through iterative coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns related to learning design practices and student reading interest (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Questionnaire results were analyzed descriptively to support qualitative

interpretations. Throughout the process, reflexive memoing and peer debriefing were used to enhance analytical rigor. This methodological integration allowed a comprehensive understanding of how teacher-designed learning environments contribute to students' interest in reading Arabic texts.

Result and Discussion

Arabic language teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan play an important role as learning designers in shaping students' interest in reading Arabic texts. Three key themes emerged from the analysis: (1) intentional lesson design that integrates student-centered learning activities, (2) the incorporation of meaningful and authentic reading materials, and (3) structured scaffolding to support comprehension and motivation. Collectively, these practices were perceived by students as stimulating, supportive, and relevant to their personal and academic needs. These findings align with previous studies which argue that the way learning is designed significantly influences students' engagement and motivation in language reading contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Klimova, 2019).

The first major finding concerns the teachers' deliberate approach to lesson planning. Teachers reported that they carefully structured reading activities to promote interaction, inquiry, and discussion rather than relying solely on translation or teacher explanation. Observations confirmed that students were encouraged to predict meaning, discuss vocabulary collaboratively, and connect texts with real-life contexts. Such design decisions demonstrate a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward learning environments in which students actively construct meaning. This is consistent with the concept of teachers as learning designers who orchestrate learning conditions rather than merely deliver content (Laurillard, 2019).

Students' interest appeared to increase when lessons emphasized participation and autonomy. Many students reported feeling more motivated when given opportunities to express understanding, ask questions, and negotiate meaning with peers. These results support theories of self-determination which suggest that motivation grows when learning environments meet students' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Compared with previous studies reporting low motivation in traditional Arabic reading classrooms (Althaqafi, 2021), the present findings highlight the value of intentional learning design in transforming reading from a passive requirement into an engaging experience.

A second key finding relates to the teachers' choice of reading materials. Teachers deliberately integrated texts that were contextually relevant, such as short religious stories, contemporary articles, and thematic passages linked to students' daily lives. Students reported that such materials felt more meaningful and were easier to relate to compared with purely grammatical or textbook-based texts. Prior research has shown that authentic reading materials help learners see the relevance of language learning, thereby increasing interest and persistence (Rashid & Yunus, 2023; Schiefele et al., 2016).



This study extends previous work by showing how material selection forms part of a broader learning design strategy. Authentic materials were not used in isolation but were embedded within structured activities, for example pre-reading discussions, vocabulary exploration, and reflective responses. This design allowed students to engage at multiple cognitive levels, from surface understanding to deeper interpretation. Compared with studies where authentic texts were introduced without adequate scaffolding, which sometimes overwhelmed learners (Yunus et al., 2021), the present findings suggest that authenticity must be paired with supportive instructional sequencing.

The third major finding concerns scaffolding strategies. Teachers provided structured guidance through vocabulary previews, guided questioning, and gradual withdrawal of support as students' confidence increased. Students reported that this guidance prevented frustration and helped them feel capable of reading increasingly complex texts. These findings are consistent with the literature emphasizing scaffolding as a key mechanism for building reading competence and sustaining motivation (Nowell et al., 2017).

Importantly, scaffolding was not limited to linguistic support but also included emotional encouragement and the creation of a positive classroom climate. Students described feeling respected and supported, which in turn enhanced their willingness to participate. This resonates with research indicating that relational support from teachers contributes significantly to reading engagement (Toste et al., 2020). Thus, the role of the teacher as learning designer extends beyond cognitive structuring to include affective and social dimensions of learning.

The results clearly support the main objective of this study: to understand how Arabic language teachers function as learning designers in enhancing reading interest. Evidence shows that learning design practices collectively contribute to strengthening students' interest in reading Arabic texts. These findings also indicate that the teacher's role is not limited to instructional delivery but includes intentional design of learning environments that nurture curiosity and engagement.

This study confirms that motivation and reading interest increase when students experience autonomy, relevance, and competence in language learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Schiefele et al., 2016). However, unlike earlier studies that primarily examined English language learning (e.g., Klimova, 2019), this research provides evidence within the context of Arabic learning in Islamic secondary schools. It also extends previous findings which highlighted low motivation in traditional Arabic classrooms (Alrabai, 2018; Althaqafi, 2021), demonstrating that motivation can be enhanced when teachers adopt a design-oriented approach.

The findings suggest that the mechanism of improvement lies in how learning is structured. When teachers consciously design activities that encourage inquiry, interaction, and personal relevance, students perceive reading as meaningful rather than burdensome. This highlights the need for professional development programs that

support teachers in developing learning design competencies. Practically, schools may benefit from encouraging collaborative lesson planning, reflective practice, and innovation in reading instruction. The study also underscores that reading interest is not merely an individual trait but emerges from social and pedagogical contexts. Thus, improving reading competence requires systemic attention to classroom design rather than focusing solely on students' weaknesses.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a single Islamic secondary school. Therefore, findings may not be fully generalizable to other educational contexts. Second, the qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth, meaning causal relationships cannot be firmly established. Third, student self-reports may have been influenced by social desirability. Future research may employ mixed-methods designs or include classroom interventions to evaluate the causal impact of specific design strategies on reading motivation. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insight into how teachers' design practices shape learning experiences.

This research demonstrates that Arabic language teachers who intentionally design learning environments that are interactive, meaningful, and supportive can significantly enhance students' interest in reading Arabic texts. These findings reinforce the argument that teachers should be empowered as learning designers, not merely content deliverers. Strengthening this role has important implications for Arabic pedagogy, religious literacy development, and broader language education practice.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the role of Arabic language teachers as learning designers plays a decisive part in enhancing Grade XII students' interest in reading Arabic texts at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Pacitan. By intentionally planning instructional activities, integrating student-centered strategies, and contextualizing texts with meaningful learning supports, teachers are able to transform reading from a passive task into an engaging and motivational learning experience. The findings advance current understanding by demonstrating that teacher agency in instructional design is not only pedagogically important, but also directly influences students' affective engagement with Arabic literacy. This contribution highlights that improving students' reading interest requires a shift from teacher-centered delivery toward deliberate learning design practices that prioritize relevance, active participation, and autonomy. Future studies may explore longitudinal impacts of teacher-designed interventions and examine how these practices can be replicated in different Islamic education contexts.

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