



Santri's Lived Experiences in Learning to Read Classical Arabic Texts: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study explores santri's lived experiences in learning to read classical Arabic texts at Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili Islamic Boarding School through a phenomenological approach. The research aims to understand how students construct meaning and develop reading strategies within the traditional pesantren learning environment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving selected santri with experience in studying classical texts. The findings reveal that students' reading experiences are characterized by a strong dependence on teachers, where reading is perceived as an activity guided and validated by the ustadz. This dependence limits the development of independent metacognitive reading strategies. However, the study also identifies the emergence of adaptive strategies employed by santri, including memorizing grammatical patterns (nahwu-sharaf), engaging in peer discussions, and utilizing marginal glosses (makna gandul) as cognitive and technical supports. These strategies reflect students' active efforts to cope with the complexity of unvowelled classical texts. From a phenomenological perspective, reading is not merely a cognitive activity but a socially and spiritually embedded practice shaped by tradition, authority, and collective learning culture. This study contributes to the understanding of reading strategies in Islamic boarding schools by highlighting the interplay between dependence, adaptation, and lived experience in language learning.

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Introduction

Reading instruction in Arabic, particularly in relation to classical texts (*turāth*), is theoretically understood not merely as a process of linguistic decoding, but as a complex interplay of cognitive, metacognitive, and existential experiences. From a psycholinguistic perspective, reading is viewed as an interaction between linguistic knowledge (Al-Janaideh et al., 2023), the reader's prior experience (Iser, 2022), and the cognitive strategies employed to construct meaning from texts (Cromley, 2023). Furthermore, within the context of second language (L2) learning, reading strategies encompass the integrated use of skimming, scanning, inferencing, as well as grammatical and semantic knowledge (N. J. Anderson, 1991). In the case of classical Arabic, this complexity is further intensified by the inherent characteristics of *turāth* texts, which are typically unvowelled, semantically dense, and structurally rich in *nahwu* (syntax) and *ṣarf* (morphology).

Oxford (1990) emphasizes that successful language acquisition is strongly influenced by the strategies employed by learners, including cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective



strategies. In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), these strategies often manifest in distinctive pedagogical practices such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *halaqah*, each embodying its own instructional philosophy (Mardani, 2025). A phenomenological approach further highlights that learners' lived experiences constitute a primary source for understanding the reality of learning. In this regard, reading strategies are not merely technical procedures but are embedded experiences shaped through learners' interactions with texts, teachers, and the broader *pesantren* tradition.

A number of previous studies have underscored the importance of strategies in reading classical Arabic texts. For instance, Ayatullah & Farhana (2024) found that comprehension of classical Arabic texts is significantly influenced by grammatical analysis skills and the use of contextual inferencing strategies. Similarly, Abu bakar, et.al., (Abu Bakar et al., 2022) demonstrated that students who employ a combination of cognitive and metacognitive strategies achieve better comprehension of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts). Rasyid, et.all., (2024) revealed that the teaching of classical texts in *pesantren* is deeply shaped by inherited pedagogical traditions, although it has not been extensively examined from the perspective of students' subjective experiences. However, most of these studies primarily focus on the technical aspects of strategies and learning outcomes, with limited attention to the lived experiences of students in constructing their reading strategies. In fact, within the *pesantren* context, learning experiences are closely intertwined with spiritual, cultural, and relational dimensions that significantly shape how students engage with and interpret texts.

Findings from observations and interviews conducted at Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili Islamic Boarding School indicate that the practice of reading classical texts demonstrates unique dynamics that do not fully align with modern theoretical frameworks of reading strategies. In daily instructional activities, students tend to rely on traditional methods such as *bandongan*, where the *kyai* or *ustadz* reads and explains the text while students listen attentively and annotate meanings (*makna gandul*). In such contexts, independent reading strategies such as skimming or scanning are rarely observed explicitly. Interview data further reveal that most students perceive reading classical texts as a process of "following" the teacher's explanation rather than independently constructing meaning. Many students reported experiencing difficulties when attempting to understand texts without direct guidance, particularly in identifying syntactic structures and interpreting complex vocabulary. This suggests that the cognitive strategies employed remain limited and highly dependent on teacher authority.

At the same time, the findings also reveal the emergence of informal strategies that develop organically among students. These include memorizing *nahwu-ṣarf* patterns, engaging in peer discussions, and maintaining personal notes to facilitate comprehension. Additionally, students gradually develop a form of linguistic intuition through repeated exposure to the same texts. This phenomenon indicates that, although not formally structured, students possess contextually grounded and experience-based learning strategies. Reading, in this sense, is not solely an academic activity but is also oriented toward attaining *barakah* (spiritual blessing) and fostering a connection with the Islamic scholarly tradition. This spiritual and cultural dimension significantly influences how students perceive reading, extending beyond purely cognitive processes.

Based on the comparison between theoretical frameworks and empirical realities, it can be concluded that a significant gap exists between the ideal concept of reading strategies and their actual implementation at Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili Islamic Boarding School. Theoretically,



reading is conceptualized as an active process involving various cognitive and metacognitive strategies, requiring learner autonomy in constructing textual meaning. In practice, however, the teaching of classical texts in pesantren remains heavily reliant on teacher-centered traditional methods, thereby limiting opportunities for the development of independent strategies.

The empirical findings further suggest that students' learning experiences are rich and multifaceted, extending beyond what conventional reading strategy theories can adequately explain. These experiences encompass cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that interact dynamically in shaping students' approaches to reading. Thus, the identified gap reflects not only limitations in pedagogical practice but also the insufficiency of existing theories in capturing the complexity of learning experiences within the pesantren context. Therefore, a more in-depth and context-sensitive approach is required, particularly through a phenomenological lens that seeks to explore students' lived experiences directly. Such an approach is expected to uncover the underlying meanings embedded in the practice of reading classical texts and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by students.

Based on the identified gap, this study aims to explore and understand in depth the lived experiences of santri in learning to read classical Arabic texts at Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili Islamic Boarding School. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate how students construct and employ reading strategies within the context of *turāth* learning, as well as how they interpret these experiences across cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Literature Review

Reading Strategies in L2 and Classical Arabic Context

The Concept of L2 Reading Strategies

Reading strategies in a L2 refer to a set of cognitive and metacognitive processes employed by learners to comprehend texts effectively and meaningfully (Cromley, 2023). Reading is no longer viewed as a linear activity that merely involves decoding linguistic symbols, it is understood as a complex, interactive, and dynamic process of meaning construction (Zhao et al., 2025). This process involves the interaction between the reader's linguistic knowledge (such as vocabulary and grammar), background knowledge, and the strategies used to process textual information.

L2 reading is generally conceptualized through two major approaches: *bottom-up processing* and *top-down processing*. The bottom-up approach emphasizes the gradual recognition of linguistic elements leading to meaning construction. In contrast, the top-down approach highlights the role of prior knowledge, prediction, and contextual understanding in interpreting texts. In practice, effective readers integrate these two approaches through an *interactive model of reading*, in which textual information and reader knowledge operate simultaneously (Quan et al., 2025). Reading strategies serve as essential tools that enable learners to manage the reading process effectively. These strategies extend beyond literal comprehension, encompassing the ability to interpret, evaluate, and reconstruct meaning within broader contexts. Consequently, reading strategies are closely associated with metacognitive abilities, namely, learners' awareness and control over their own thinking processes during reading (Tang & Calafato, 2021). Learners with high metacognitive awareness are generally more capable of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their comprehension independently.

Reading strategies in a L2 can be categorized into three main types: *global strategies*, *problem-solving strategies*, and *support strategies*. Global strategies refer to general planning and management techniques, such as setting reading goals, previewing texts, and activating prior knowledge before reading (Yuna et al., 2025). These strategies help readers establish an initial framework for understanding the text. Problem-solving strategies are employed when readers encounter difficulties in comprehension (Mishra, 2023). These are more localized and immediate strategies, such as inferencing word meanings from context, rereading specific sections, slowing down reading speed, or focusing attention on challenging parts. These strategies reflect active reader engagement in real-time comprehension problem-solving. Support strategies include additional techniques that facilitate reading, such as note-taking, text annotation, dictionary use, or translating specific segments (Dulay & Burt, 1974). Although often considered auxiliary, these strategies play a crucial role, particularly for novice learners or when dealing with complex texts.

Reading Strategies in Classical Arabic Texts (*Turats*)

Reading strategies in classical Arabic texts (*turats*) exhibit greater complexity compared to modern texts. This is due to the dense linguistic structure, the use of classical vocabulary, and the absence of diacritical marks (*harakat*), which require advanced grammatical analysis. Consequently, readers of *turats* texts must integrate competencies in *nahwu* (syntax), *sharaf* (morphology), as well as an understanding of historical and scholarly contexts.

Studies indicate that the teaching of classical texts in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) often employs traditional approaches such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, which emphasize knowledge transmission from teacher to student (Mardani, 2025). However, these approaches tend to provide limited space for the development of independent, metacognitively driven reading strategies. On the other hand, some studies reveal that students (*santri*) implicitly develop reading strategies through repeated learning experiences (Burhanuddin, 2021; Sanah et al., 2022; Wijaya & Zulkarnain, 2023). The use of *makna gandul* annotations, group discussions, and repeated reading practices represent adaptive strategies that emerge within the *pesantren* context (Sa'diyah & Abdurahman, 2021). This suggests that reading strategies in *turats* are highly contextual and do not always align with modern theoretical frameworks of reading.

Metacognition and Awareness of Reading Strategies

Metacognition is a key concept in L2 learning, particularly in understanding effective reading processes. Conceptually, metacognition refers to an individual's awareness of their own thinking processes (*thinking about thinking*) and their ability to consciously regulate those processes. It involves learners' capacity to plan strategies before reading, monitor comprehension during reading, and evaluate comprehension after reading.

Metacognition in educational contexts is commonly divided into two primary dimensions such as *metacognitive knowledge* and *metacognitive regulation*. Metacognitive knowledge includes learners' awareness of themselves as readers (e.g., recognizing strengths and weaknesses), their understanding of reading tasks (e.g., text difficulty), and their knowledge of available strategies (R. C. Anderson & Haney, 2021; Calafato, 2020; Cromley, 2023; Vinney et al., 2018). Meanwhile, metacognitive regulation refers to the ability to actively manage the reading process, including setting reading goals, selecting appropriate strategies, continuously monitoring comprehension, and making adjustments when difficulties arise.

The role of metacognition becomes particularly significant in L2 contexts, where learners often face linguistic limitations that may hinder comprehension. In such situations, learners with



high metacognitive awareness are more likely to identify comprehension difficulties and actively employ strategies to overcome them, such as rereading, using contextual clues to infer meaning, or connecting new information with prior knowledge. In contrast, learners with low metacognitive awareness tend to engage in passive reading without monitoring their own understanding. The role of metacognition becomes even more complex. The absence of diacritics, dense syntactic structures, and high levels of semantic abstraction require learners to possess strong self-regulation skills. However, in practice, learning in pesantren environments often emphasizes knowledge transmission through teachers, thereby limiting opportunities for the explicit development of metacognitive awareness. This indicates a tension between the cognitive demands of reading *turats* texts and existing pedagogical practices.

Phenomenological Perspective in Language Learning

Phenomenology as an Approach in Language Education Research

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that focuses on individuals' lived experiences in understanding a particular phenomenon. In the context of language education, phenomenology is used to explore how learners make meaning of their learning experiences, including the strategies they employ in comprehending texts. This approach emphasizes that learning realities cannot be fully understood solely through observable behavior, but must also consider individuals' subjective experiences. The concept of *lived experience* lies at the core of phenomenology (Creswell et al., 2007). In language learning, this experience encompasses not only cognitive activities but also emotional, social, and even spiritual dimensions. This is particularly relevant in the pesantren context, where learning processes are deeply intertwined with religious values and scholarly traditions. Thus, phenomenology provides a framework for understanding learners' internal dimensions, such as perceptions, motivations, and the meanings they construct throughout the learning process.

Phenomenology in the Study of Arabic Learning in Pesantren

In the pesantren context, a phenomenological approach is highly relevant as it captures the complexity of students' learning experiences, which are not merely academic but also cultural and spiritual. The study of classical texts is not only viewed as a reading activity but also as part of a broader intellectual tradition imbued with specific values. However, research examining Arabic learning in pesantren from a phenomenological perspective remains relatively limited. Most studies have focused on teaching methods or learning outcomes, with little attention given to the subjective experiences of students in learning to read classical texts. Therefore, this study holds significant value in addressing this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of students' lived experiences in developing reading strategies for classical Arabic texts.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of *santri* (Islamic boarding school students) in learning to read classical Arabic texts at Pondok Pesantren Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili, Centre Lampung. A phenomenological approach was chosen because the study focuses on exploring the meanings of subjective experiences as perceived by individuals within a specific context. Within this design, participants were

not subjected to experimental manipulation; rather, they were observed naturalistically within their everyday learning environments.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The participants of this study were *santri* actively engaged in learning classical Islamic texts at Pondok Pesantren Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) students who had participated in classical text learning for at least one year, (2) those with direct experience in reading *turats* texts, and (3) those willing to participate in in-depth interviews. The number of participants ranged from 8 to 12 individuals, which is considered sufficient in phenomenological research to achieve data depth and richness. The sampling procedure was conducted in stages. First, the researcher coordinated with the pesantren authorities to identify potential participants who met the criteria. Subsequently, an initial approach was made to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain participants' informed consent. Purposive sampling was selected because the study requires participants with specific and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to explore the subjective experiences of *santri* in reading classical texts. The interview questions focused on the reading strategies employed, the challenges encountered, and the meanings constructed during the learning process. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded with participants' consent. Participant observation was carried out to directly examine the process of learning classical texts in the classroom. This included observing interactions between *kyai* or *ustadz* (teachers) and students, as well as the reading practices performed. The purpose of this observation was to obtain contextual data that would support and enrich the interview findings. Documentation data included learning notes, the classical texts used, and *makna gandul* annotations produced by the students. These documents were used to strengthen and validate the findings obtained from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The analytical procedures included: (1) reading and re-reading interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the data, (2) identifying initial themes emerging from the data, (3) clustering these themes into broader categories, (4) interpreting the meanings of participants' experiences, and (5) constructing an essential description of the phenomenon under study. The analysis process was conducted iteratively and reflectively, whereby the researcher continuously compared data across sources to identify consistent patterns and meanings.

Result and Discussion



Dependence on Teachers in Reading Classical Texts

One of the central findings emerging from the data analysis is the strong dependence of *santri* on teachers in the process of reading and understanding classical texts. This finding illustrates that reading activities within the pesantren context are not positioned as autonomous individual practices; rather, they are inherently tied to the presence, explanations, and authority of the teacher. This dependence is not merely technical in terms of linguistic comprehension, but also reflects the pedagogical and cultural dimensions that shape how *santri* perceive the act of reading itself.

Reading as Following the Ustadz

Interview results indicate that most *santri* perceive reading classical texts as an activity of following the reading flow and explanations provided by the *ustadz*. In daily learning practices, students tend to position themselves as listeners and note-takers, rather than as active readers who independently construct meaning from the text. In this sense, reading becomes a receptive process in which meaning is perceived as something “given” by the teacher rather than “discovered” by the students. As one participant stated:

“Usually, we do not read first before the *ustadz* explains. We wait for the *ustadz* to read, then we add the meaning in the book.”

This statement suggests that the reading process does not begin with direct interaction between the student and the text, but is fully mediated by the teacher. In other words, classical texts are not encountered directly as objects of interpretation, but as materials that must first be “unlocked” through the authority of the teacher. Another participant added:

“If the *ustadz* has not read it yet, we do not dare to read, because we are afraid of making mistakes.”

This phenomenon indicates that reading is not merely a linguistic skill but also a socially regulated practice shaped by norms and hierarchies within the pesantren environment. Students not only learn how to read texts, but also learn *how reading should be conducted*—that is, by following established sequences and authority structures. Consequently, the reading experience for *santri* is more collective and structured rather than individual and exploratory.

Difficulties in Independent Reading

Dependence on teachers also contributes to significant challenges when *santri* are faced with independent reading situations. Based on interview findings, many students expressed confusion and uncertainty when attempting to understand texts without direct guidance from the *ustadz*, particularly in determining *i’rab* (grammatical inflection), analyzing sentence structures, and interpreting word meanings within appropriate contexts. One participant explained:

“When asked to read independently, I often feel confused about where to start, especially when there are no diacritical marks.”

This statement reflects that the primary challenge in reading classical texts lies not only in limited vocabulary, but also in the complexity of linguistic structures that require deep grammatical analysis. Without teacher support, students tend to lose direction in comprehending the text. Another participant noted:

"Sometimes I can read, but I am not sure whether it is correct or not, so it is better to wait for the *ustadz's* explanation."

This expression reveals a form of epistemic uncertainty, where students lack confidence in validating their own understanding. As a result, reliance on the teacher as the primary source of truth is reinforced. Nevertheless, some students reported efforts to overcome these difficulties, such as revisiting their notes, engaging in peer discussions, or recalling previous explanations. However, these efforts remain limited and do not yet fully reflect the systematic use of independent reading strategies.

Teacher Authority in Determining Meaning

Beyond being a source of knowledge, the teacher is also positioned as the primary authority in determining textual meaning. In this context, meaning is not viewed as an open interpretive process, but rather as something fixed and aligned with the teacher's explanation. Students tend to avoid alternative interpretations and prefer to adhere to the meanings provided. As one participant stated:

"If the *ustadz* has already given the meaning, we just follow it; we do not dare to differ."

This statement indicates clear limitations in the interpretive space available to students. Meaning is not negotiated, but hierarchically transmitted from teacher to student. Here, the teacher's authority is not only pedagogical but also epistemological, defining what constitutes valid understanding. Another participant remarked:

"We are afraid of being wrong if we interpret it ourselves, because the texts are deep."

This highlights how the complexity of classical texts further reinforces the teacher's position as the sole legitimate source of meaning. Without guidance, students perceive a high risk of misinterpretation. Importantly, this dependence is not always perceived negatively by students. On the contrary, many interpret it as an integral part of the learning process and even as a form of respect for the scholarly tradition. In this sense, teacher authority is not only accepted but internalized as a meaningful component of their educational experience.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that *santri's* experiences in reading classical texts are strongly characterized by dependence on teachers—whether in understanding texts, determining meaning, or developing confidence as readers. This dependence is reflected in three main aspects: reading as following the *ustadz*, difficulties in independent reading, and the dominance of teacher authority in meaning-making. These findings offer important insights when examined in relation to L2 reading strategy theories and phenomenological perspectives on learning.



The literature on L2 reading emphasizes that effective readers are those who can independently develop cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as inferencing, monitoring, and self-regulation in text comprehension. Studies by Hsu and Wang (2020) indicate that the use of metacognitive strategies significantly enhances reading comprehension, particularly in complex texts. Similarly, Liu (2021) argues that learners with high strategic awareness are able to transfer reading strategies across various academic contexts. Within this framework, reading is positioned as an active process requiring full engagement from the reader in constructing meaning.

However, the findings of this study reveal a different condition, where *santri* tend to position themselves as recipients of meaning conveyed by the teacher, rather than as active agents in meaning construction. This suggests a gap between the ideal conceptualization of reading strategies and the actual pedagogical practices in pesantren. The reliance on teachers indicates that metacognitive strategies have not yet developed optimally as independent practices, but remain embedded within strong pedagogical mediation.

From a phenomenological perspective, this dependence can be understood as part of the lived experience that is positively constructed by students. It does not merely reflect cognitive limitations, but also represents an epistemological relationship between *santri* and teacher. In the students' experience, the teacher functions not only as a facilitator, but also as a source of meaning legitimacy and scholarly authority. Thus, reading classical texts is not solely a cognitive activity, but also a social practice embedded with values of respect, trust, and spiritual significance.

The difficulties encountered in independent reading further support the argument that the complexity of *turats* texts is a significant factor influencing students' reading strategies. The absence of diacritical marks and the density of grammatical structures demand a high level of linguistic competence, making dependence on teachers a logical adaptive strategy. In this context, such dependence may be viewed as a form of scaffolding that enables students to gradually internalize complex linguistic structures, even if this process is not always consciously recognized as a strategy.

Finally, the dominance of teacher authority in determining meaning indicates that textual interpretation within the pesantren context is inherently hierarchical. This differs from modern educational approaches that tend to encourage more open and critical interpretation. However, within the pesantren tradition, such authority is an integral component of scholarly transmission, where the validity of meaning is determined not only by textual analysis but also by the intellectual lineage (*sanad*) possessed by the teacher. Consequently, text comprehension is not merely linguistic in nature, but also deeply epistemological.

Adaptive Strategies of Santri in Understanding Texts

In addition to demonstrating strong dependence on teachers, the findings of this study also reveal that *santri* develop various adaptive strategies in understanding classical Arabic texts. These strategies emerge as responses to the complexity of *turats*

texts and the limitations students face in independent reading. Notably, these strategies are not always explicitly taught in formal instructional processes; rather, they develop organically through learning experiences, social interactions, and habitual practices within the pesantren environment.

These adaptive strategies reflect the active efforts of *santri* to bridge the gap between their existing competencies and the demands of the texts they encounter. From a phenomenological perspective, these strategies function not only as technical tools but also as integral components of the learners' lived experiences. This theme is further elaborated into three main subthemes: memorization of *nahwu-sharaf* patterns, peer discussion, and the use of *makna gandul* annotations.

Memorization of Nahwu-Sharaf Patterns

One of the most dominant strategies employed by *santri* is the memorization of *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology) patterns as a foundation for understanding sentence structures in classical Arabic texts. Given that *turats* texts are generally unvowelled, the ability to identify grammatical functions becomes essential for determining meaning. Therefore, students seek to strengthen their understanding by memorizing fundamental rules related to *i'rab*, word forms, and morphological patterns. As one participant explained:

"If we do not memorize *nahwu*, it is very difficult to understand the text. So I usually repeat memorization, like *Jurumiyah*, so I can read."

This statement indicates that memorization is not merely a mechanical activity, but a cognitive strategy aimed at building a foundational framework for text comprehension. By internalizing specific patterns, students attempt to create mental structures that can be automatically applied when encountering texts. Another participant noted:

"Sometimes I do not directly understand the meaning, but if I know the pattern, I can roughly guess what it means."

This suggests that memorizing *nahwu-sharaf* patterns enables students to perform inferencing, even if it does not always lead to precise understanding. This strategy is adaptive, as it allows students to continue engaging with texts despite their limitations. However, this strategy also has limitations. Some students acknowledged that memorization tends to be mechanical and is not always easily applied flexibly in more complex textual contexts. Nevertheless, within the lived experiences of *santri*, memorization remains an essential and irreplaceable strategy in learning to read classical texts.

Peer Discussion among Santri

In addition to memorization, *santri* actively employ social strategies, particularly peer discussions, to facilitate text comprehension. These discussions typically occur outside formal instructional hours where students exchange ideas, ask questions, and attempt to explain difficult parts of the text. One participant stated:



“If I do not understand, I usually ask my friends. Sometimes friends explain more easily than the *ustadz*.”

This highlights that peer interaction serves as an important alternative source of learning. In some cases, peers are perceived as more accessible because they use simpler language and share similar levels of understanding. Another participant added:

“We often discuss together, reread the text, and correct each other if something is wrong.”

This indicates that discussion functions not only as a means of sharing information but also as a mechanism for correction and validation. Through discussion, *santri* can test their interpretations and gain new perspectives on the text. From a phenomenological standpoint, this reflects that learning experiences are not purely individual but inherently collective. Textual understanding is constructed through social interaction, allowing for the negotiation of meaning. Thus, this strategy contributes not only to cognitive development but also to strengthening social bonds and fostering a collaborative learning environment within the *pesantren*.

Makna Gandul Annotations

Another distinctive strategy within the *pesantren* context is the use of *makna gandul* annotations, which involve writing word or phrase meanings directly beneath the Arabic text. These annotations are typically produced during lessons, following the explanations provided by the *ustadz*. As one participant explained:

“I always write the meaning under the text, so when I read it again later, I do not forget.”

These notes function as visual aids that facilitate comprehension when students reread texts independently. With *makna gandul*, students do not need to rely entirely on the teacher’s explanations, as portions of meaning are already embedded within the text itself. Another participant remarked:

“If the *makna gandul* is already there, it is easier to read by myself, although I still need to check the grammar.”

This suggests that *makna gandul* serves as a form of scaffolding that helps students bridge their understanding of the text. It enables them to revisit previously acquired knowledge, thereby making the reading process more efficient. However, some students also acknowledged that reliance on *makna gandul* may reduce their ability to comprehend texts independently without assistance. Despite this limitation, the strategy remains an integral part of their learning experience, as it provides a sense of security and reduces the difficulty of engaging with complex texts.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that, despite limitations in independent reading and strong dependence on teachers, *santri* actively develop various adaptive strategies to understand classical Arabic texts. These strategies encompass cognitive dimensions (through memorization of *nahwu–sharaf* patterns), social dimensions (through peer discussion), and technical dimensions (through the use of *makna gandul* annotations).

This demonstrates that *santri* are not merely passive learners, but active agents who negotiate their understanding within the constraints of their learning context.

These findings align with the concept of language learning strategies in L2 acquisition literature, particularly those involving cognitive, social, and compensatory strategies. The memorization of *nahwu-sharaf* patterns can be understood as a cognitive strategy aimed at building linguistic foundations for text comprehension. In this framework, memorization functions as a tool for pattern recognition and meaning prediction, consistent with established theories in language learning (Zein et al., 2025). Previous studies have shown that structure-based strategies contribute significantly to the comprehension of complex texts, especially in languages with rich morphological and syntactic systems (Fazrina & Muradi, 2020; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Muis, 2020; Zou & Lertlit, 2022). However, the findings also indicate that memorization practices in the pesantren context are not entirely aligned with the flexible cognitive strategies described in modern literature. Memorization tends to be mechanical and not fully integrated with deeper analytical skills (tajib & Adawiyah, 2022). Thus, while effective at early stages of comprehension, its utility in addressing more complex texts remains limited. This highlights a gap between theoretical conceptualizations of cognitive strategies and their practical implementation.

The strategy of peer discussion reflects the importance of the social dimension in learning processes. This finding is consistent with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning is socially mediated through interaction. In this context, peer discussions function as a form of scaffolding, where learners support one another in constructing understanding. Research in language learning has shown that social interaction enhances comprehension through meaning negotiation and conceptual clarification (Alsaraireh et al., 2023; Alshammari et al., 2024; Hart & Okkali, 2021; Ilmiani & Muid, 2021; Red'ko et al., 2023). Interestingly, within the pesantren context, discussion serves not only as a cognitive tool but also as a space for building solidarity and communal bonds among *santri*. This indicates that learning strategies cannot be separated from the social context in which they are embedded. Their effectiveness is shaped not only by cognitive factors but also by the social dynamics that support the learning process. The use of *makna gandul* annotations can be understood as a compensatory strategy that helps students overcome gaps between their abilities and task demands. In language learning literature, compensatory strategies are employed when learners face limitations in comprehension. In this case, *makna gandul* functions as an external memory aid, allowing students to access meaning without relying solely on internal recall.

Conclusion

The experiences of *santri* in reading classical texts at Pondok Pesantren Misbahul Munir As-Suhaili constitute a complex process in which dependence on teachers and the development of adaptive strategies occur simultaneously and complement one another. On the one hand, the strong role of the teacher indicates that reading instruction



remains dominated by pedagogical authority, which limits students' autonomy in constructing textual meaning. On the other hand, *santri* are not entirely passive; rather, they actively develop various adaptive strategies, such as memorizing *nahwu-sharaf* patterns, engaging in peer discussions, and utilizing *makna gandul* annotations as scaffolding for comprehension. This finding suggests that reading strategies in the pesantren context cannot be understood solely as individual cognitive processes, but must be viewed as practices embedded within social, cultural, and experiential dimensions of learning. Thus, the learning of classical texts represents a dynamic interplay between structural dependence and emerging autonomy, continuously negotiated within the lived experiences of *santri*.

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