



Tripartite Barriers in Arabic Grammar Instruction: A Phenomenological Study of Methodological, Curricular, and Learner-Related Challenges in a University-Affiliated Islamic Dormitory

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study investigates the challenges of Nahwu (Arabic grammar) instruction at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah IAIN Kerinci, Indonesia, focusing on three interdependent dimensions: instructional methodology, curriculum content, and learner characteristics. Existing research has largely examined these dimensions in isolation, leaving unresolved how they interact within a single institutional setting. This study addresses this gap by treating the three dimensions as mutually reinforcing barriers within a university-affiliated Islamic dormitory context.

Design/methodology/approach - A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with 12 students and 3 instructors, 8 sessions of non-participant classroom observation conducted over 4 weeks, and document analysis of the *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* textbook and institutional curriculum materials. Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, member checking, and reflexive journaling. Ethical clearance was obtained from IAIN Kerinci, and all participants and their guardians provided informed consent before data collection.

Findings/results - Thematic analysis reveals four interconnected challenges: limited conceptual scaffolding within the discussion-based instructional method; inadequate contextualization of classical curriculum content, particularly *Matan Al-Jurumiyah*; perceived abstraction and irrelevance-driven low learner motivation; and systemic misalignment between pedagogical practice and digital learning preferences of contemporary students. These challenges do not operate independently—each compounded the others, producing a learning environment in which persistence with Nahwu is cognitively costly and motivationally unrewarding. Representative student accounts illustrate this compounding dynamic: one participant described feeling “less motivated in class because the teaching method lacks detailed explanation” while simultaneously experiencing Nahwu as “hard to apply in practice,” capturing the simultaneous operation of methodological, curricular, and motivational barriers.

Originality/value - This study is the first to examine methodological, curricular, and learner-characteristic challenges as an interdependent, cooperative system within a university-affiliated Ma'had context in Indonesia. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development, it proposes an integrative reform matrix combining technology-enhanced learning, contextualized Qur'anic and Hadith content, and



scaffolded student-centered pedagogy. This study makes three specific contributions: (1) an empirically grounded tripartite barrier model that demonstrates the interdependence of method, content, and learner characteristics; (2) a four-dimension reform matrix applicable to comparable Ma'had institutions across Indonesia; and (3) evidence from a resource-constrained regional Islamic HEI context not previously examined in the Nahwu literature. Study limitations—including the single-site design, cross-sectional data, and absence of quantitative outcome measures—constrain transferability; future experimental and multisite comparative research is needed.

Paper type – Research paper

Keywords: Nahwu instruction; Arabic grammar pedagogy; Zone of Proximal Development; Islamic higher education

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1. Introduction

Arabic grammar—known in the Islamic scholarly tradition as Nahwu—is one of the most conceptually demanding subjects in Islamic education. Its function is not incidental: accurate grammatical knowledge determines whether a reader can distinguish the subject from the object of a classical sentence, identify the agent of a Qur'anic command, or derive a legal ruling from an Arabic-medium jurisprudential text. For students in Indonesian Islamic institutions, Nahwu is therefore not simply an academic subject but the key that unlocks independent access to fourteen centuries of Islamic scholarship (Yul & Andrian, 2024). Yet research across pesantren and university-affiliated Islamic dormitory contexts consistently documents that students struggle with it—not because the subject is inherently beyond their reach, but because the conditions under which it is taught create barriers that sustained effort alone cannot overcome (Alimin et al., 2021; Maimun & Maulani, 2022; Ulfah, 2023).

Three broad bodies of scholarship have mapped these barriers, though they have done so separately. The first body focuses on textbook structure: Alimin et al. (2021) demonstrated that *Matan Al-Jurumiyah*—the foundational Nahwu text used across most Indonesian Islamic institutions—presupposes prior grammatical knowledge that beginning students do not possess, generating surface-level memorisation rather than conceptual understanding. Nasrulloh (2022) and Huda and Irawan (2024) confirmed that this curricular architecture produces predictable downstream errors in students' reading of Arabic-medium texts. The second body focuses on motivation: Maimun and Maulani (2022) found that limited grammatical mastery and low motivation reinforce each other cyclically, while Ulfah (2023) documented students' persistent association of Nahwu with difficulty, tedium, and perceived irrelevance. Saleha et al. (2025) showed that motivational orientations are context-sensitive and decline sharply when instruction fails to connect grammatical knowledge to communicative or religious purpose. The third body examines pedagogy and technology: Mizan et al. (2024) found that structured mentoring approaches significantly improved motivation relative to conventional instruction, and Keskin et al. (2020) provided meta-analytic evidence that computer-assisted language learning produces significant grammar acquisition gains when digital tools offer immediate corrective feedback.

The problem this study addresses is that these three bodies of scholarship have not been brought together within a single analytical frame. Students and teachers do not experience methodological constraints, curricular limitations, and motivational deficits as separate phenomena—they experience them simultaneously, and each dimension compounds the others. A student whose prior knowledge is insufficient for discussion-based instruction is simultaneously a student whose motivation erodes when content feels abstract and whose digital learning preferences go unmet in a text-only pedagogical environment. Treating any one dimension in isolation produces partial diagnosis and partial remedy.

A second gap is institutional. The overwhelming majority of Nahwu research has been conducted in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) or formal school contexts. Considerably less research has examined the *Ma'had al-Jami'ah*—the university-affiliated Islamic dormitory—which occupies a hybrid pedagogical space. In the *Ma'had* context, Nahwu instruction must simultaneously serve the institution's religious formation mission and the academic development needs of undergraduate students who arrive with variable prior grammar exposure. This hybrid mandate creates pedagogical tensions not fully captured by *pesantren*-focused scholarship.

State-of-the-art research on grammar instruction in Islamic educational contexts has advanced considerably in recent years. Alamin et al. (2024) introduced a semiotic analysis of the grammatical notation systems embedded in *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), showing that students must be explicitly taught these notation conventions before they can access the grammatical content they encode—a finding with direct implications for how Al-Jurumiyah is introduced in class. Wananda and Susilawati (2024) and Rohmah and Dimyathi (2024) demonstrated that grammatical comprehension improves substantially when rules are anchored in Qur'anic and Hadith texts rather than confined to classical reference materials. Ismail et al. (2025) provided cognitive load evidence for what practitioners observe in classrooms: when grammatical complexity is unmediated by structured support, working memory is overwhelmed and retention fails. Marwaji et al. (2025), reviewing a decade of SINTA-accredited research on grammar learning media, confirmed growing interest in visual and technology-integrated tools while noting that adoption in *Ma'had*-based instruction remains limited. Maimun and Maulani (2022), writing in *Alsuna: Journal of Arabic and English Language*, documented that analysis of Arabic language learning problems at the senior secondary religious program level revealed motivation and grammar mastery as mutually reinforcing barriers, a finding this study examines in the undergraduate *Ma'had* context.

Despite this growing body of work, no study has yet examined how methodological, curricular, and learner-characteristic challenges operate simultaneously and interactively within a single *Ma'had* setting. This gap is the departure point for the present study. Conducted at *Ma'had Al-Jami'ah* IAIN Kerinci in Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province, Sumatra—a region with a strong *pesantren* tradition but limited technology infrastructure—the study investigates how these three dimensions of challenge manifest in practice, how they interact, and what an integrative reform model would need to address. IAIN Kerinci's Nahwu programme is delivered three times per week through the discussion method using *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* as the sole textbook, by instructors whose pedagogical training is confined to their own classical education. Preliminary fieldwork identified widespread student difficulty and low motivation, making this



an instructive site for examining how structural pedagogical challenges take shape in a resource-constrained Islamic higher education context.

Three research questions guide this study:

RQ1: What methodological challenges impede effective Nahwu learning at *Ma'had* IAIN Kerinci, and how do they manifest in classroom interaction and student experience?

RQ2: How does the existing curriculum content—particularly the reliance on *Matan Al-Jurumiyah*—contribute to or constrain learner comprehension, contextualisation, and engagement?

RQ3: To what extent are the digital learning preferences and motivational orientations of 21st-century students aligned with current Nahwu instructional practices?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Nahwu in the Indonesian Islamic Educational Tradition

Nahwu as a formal discipline has been central to Islamic scholarship for over a millennium, originating as a systematic codification of Arabic grammatical rules intended to preserve the integrity of Qur'anic recitation and interpretation (Alamin et al., 2024). In Indonesian Islamic institutions, Nahwu is introduced through *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* at beginner level before progressing to *Alfiyah Ibn Malik* at advanced levels. Both texts, while epistemologically authoritative, employ a highly condensed formulaic style that presupposes significant prior linguistic competence (Alimin et al., 2021). The classical pedagogical framework built around these texts—oral transmission, text recitation, and teacher-led error correction—prioritises rule memorisation over communicative application (Jailani et al., 2024).

Yul and Andrian (2024) argue that Arabic is not merely instrumentally valuable for Indonesian Muslims but is deeply embedded in religio-linguistic identity, positioning Nahwu as both a technical subject and a culturally significant practice with stakes that exceed academic performance. This dual function creates particular pressures in the *Ma'had al-Jami'ah* context, where students arrive with heterogeneous prior exposure to Arabic grammar and are expected to engage with classical grammatical analysis from the outset of their university residence. Research by Marwaji et al. (2025), published in *Alsuna: Journal of Arabic and English Language*, reviewed SINTA-accredited literature on grammar learning media over a decade and found that while graph-based and visual tools for grammar instruction show promise, their adoption in classical boarding school contexts—including *Ma'had* settings—has been slow, constrained by institutional conservatism and limited teacher professional development.

2.2 Instructional Challenges in Nahwu Education

Empirical research identifies several recurring challenges in Nahwu instruction. The foremost is the mismatch between the structural demands of classical Nahwu texts and the prior knowledge of beginning learners. When students encounter *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* without adequate scaffolding, they engage in surface-level memorisation of grammatical formulae rather than developing the conceptual understanding necessary for reading transfer (Alimin et al., 2021; Nasrulloh, 2022). This pattern is consistent with Ismail et al.'s (2025) findings on

cognitive load in Arabic morphology instruction: when grammatical complexity is unmediated by structured support, working memory resources are exhausted and retention fails.

Motivational barriers form the second major challenge cluster. Maimun and Maulani (2022) identified low motivation and limited grammar mastery as co-constitutive barriers, demonstrating that difficulty generates negative attitudes which in turn reduce learning investment, perpetuating a self-reinforcing cycle. Ulfah (2023) corroborated these findings at the tertiary level, with students consistently associating Nahwu with tedium and irrelevance. Angelina et al. (2023) documented anxiety and avoidance behaviour associated with specific grammatical topics—including *na'at-man'ut*, *idhafah*, and *ghairu munsarif*—that further impeded learning progress. Saleha et al. (2025) demonstrated that these motivational orientations are fragile and context-sensitive: students who encountered early difficulty experienced rapid motivational decline, particularly when instruction failed to connect grammatical knowledge to communicative or religious meaning.

A third challenge concerns methodological fit. The discussion-based method—while appropriate for learners with sufficient prior knowledge—is pedagogically problematic for novice students who require explicit instruction and graduated support before productive peer discussion is possible (Bećirović et al., 2023; Mizan et al., 2024). Nimasari and Muflihah (2021) argue that scaffolding in language instruction must be dialogically structured, responsive to learner performance, and gradually released as competence develops—a model largely absent from the Nahwu classrooms documented in existing research.

2.3 21st-Century Learning and Technology Integration in Arabic Grammar Instruction

Contemporary educational discourse frames effective instruction around 21st-century competency development: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Heriman et al., 2024; Rusmin et al., 2024). For language instruction specifically, these imperatives are increasingly operationalised through technology-enhanced environments, project-based tasks, and collaborative learning designs (Ekoç, 2021; Sahito, 2025). Research in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) demonstrates consistent gains in grammar acquisition, learner motivation, and self-regulated learning when digital tools provide immediate corrective feedback and structured practice opportunities (Keskin et al., 2020). Within Arabic language education, technology adoption remains uneven. Yul et al. (2022) demonstrated that e-learning integration in Indonesian Islamic secondary education is most effective when technology is deployed purposefully within a coherent pedagogical framework with adequate teacher training. Marwaji et al. (2025) noted that despite growing scholarly interest in visual and digital grammar learning media, adoption in *Ma'had*-based Nahwu instruction is largely unrealised.

Post-millennial university students demonstrate distinctively digital learning preferences—favouring interactive, multimodal, and self-paced environments—that conflict structurally with text-bound, teacher-fronted classical instruction (Heriman et al., 2024). Bećirović et al. (2023) provided evidence that collaborative learning structures produce significant speaking skill and motivation gains, suggesting that the social learning benefits of well-designed interactive approaches extend to grammar-focused instruction as well.



2.4 Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory as Analytical Framework

This study uses Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory—particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolded instruction—as its primary theoretical frame. The ZPD describes the distance between what a learner can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guided support from a more knowledgeable other (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). Effective instruction operates within this zone through scaffolding: structured, graduated assistance that enables learners to internalise skills before gradually assuming independent responsibility.

Applied to Nahwu instruction, scaffolding requires teachers to do more than correct grammatical errors—they must actively mediate learner understanding through explicit modelling, think-aloud demonstration, graduated task complexity, and collaborative meaning-making (Nimasari & Muflihah, 2021). When scaffolding is absent, as the present study documents, learners are left to navigate complex morphosyntactic structures without the interactional support that enables internalisation. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), drawing on developmental science, confirm that the quality of mediated learning interactions is a stronger predictor of knowledge acquisition than instructional time alone—a finding with direct implications for Nahwu instruction contexts where class frequency is high but scaffolding depth is limited. Ventista and Brown (2023) further establish that teacher professional learning has significant downstream effects on student outcomes, particularly when development is job-embedded, collaborative, and sustained—conditions rarely met in current *Ma'had* teacher training arrangements.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenology was selected because the study's central aim was to capture the lived experiences of students and instructors engaged in Nahwu learning: the subjective meanings, perceptions, and felt challenges that shape their instructional encounter (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This orientation enables the analysis to move beyond observable classroom behaviours toward the deeper cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors that produce them. The phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate here because existing quantitative measures of Nahwu learning outcomes—test scores and error rates—do not reveal why students experience difficulty, only that they do. Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) original six-phase procedure: data familiarisation, initial code generation, theme search, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report production.

3.2 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

This study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci (reference number: [to be inserted by authors]). All participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the confidentiality of their data. Informed consent was obtained from all student

participants; given the participants' age range (18–22), parental consent was not required under institutional policy. Interview recordings and transcripts are stored on password-protected institutional servers and will be destroyed five years after publication.

Researcher positionality is relevant to this study's trustworthiness. Two of the three researchers have prior experience teaching Arabic in Indonesian Islamic education contexts, positioning them as partial insiders to the institutional culture under study. This insider familiarity facilitated participant rapport and access to situated knowledge but also introduced the risk of confirming existing assumptions. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout data collection and analysis to document interpretive decisions and bracket researcher assumptions. Preliminary findings were shared with two student participants and one instructor (member checking) to assess whether interpretations resonated with their experience.

3.3 Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at *Ma'had Al-Jami'ah* IAIN Kerinci, located in Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province, Sumatra, Indonesia. The site was selected based on preliminary fieldwork that identified persistent and structurally embedded Nahwu learning challenges across the student cohort. Nahwu is taught three times per week using *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* as the sole required text, delivered through a discussion-based method by resident instructors whose pedagogical training is confined to their own classical education.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure informational richness and direct relevance to the research questions. The sample comprised twelve students currently enrolled in the Nahwu programme and three Nahwu instructors. Student participants were selected to represent a range of proficiency levels and lengths of enrolment. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached—the point at which additional interviews and observations yielded no new codes—which occurred after the tenth student interview and was confirmed through the eleventh and twelfth. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection.

3.4 Data Collection

Three complementary methods were used. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all fifteen participants. Interview protocols addressed perceptions of instructional effectiveness, specific sources of difficulty, motivational factors, and preferences for alternative instructional approaches. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic, audio-recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim. Second, non-participant classroom observation was carried out across eight Nahwu sessions over four weeks, using a structured protocol to document teacher-student interactions, instructional strategies, material use, and student engagement behaviours. Field notes were recorded during and immediately after each session. Third, document analysis was conducted on the *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* textbook and relevant institutional curriculum documents to assess alignment between prescribed content and contemporary Nahwu learning objectives.



3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded iteratively following Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure, with emerging themes cross-referenced across interview transcripts, observation field notes, and document analysis findings to ensure interpretive coherence. Trustworthiness was established through three strategies: source triangulation across student accounts, instructor perspectives, and documentary evidence; member checking with two student participants and one instructor; and reflexive journaling maintained throughout the analysis process.

4. Results

4.1 Methodological Challenges — Absent Scaffolding in a Discussion-Based Classroom (RQ1)

Nahwu instruction at *Ma'had* IAIN Kerinci follows a standard discussion-based sequence: individual text reading, group translation, and teacher-led error correction. This approach preserves the classical pedagogical tradition and maintains a degree of student interaction, but the data reveal a fundamental structural problem: it presupposes prior grammatical knowledge that most enrolled students have not yet developed.

Interview data indicate that a substantial number of students cannot follow classroom discussions because they lack the foundational conceptual grounding to participate meaningfully. One student articulated this directly:

"I feel less motivated in class because the teaching method lacks detailed explanation of the material, which makes it hard for me to understand some chapters of Nahwu." (Student 3, Interview)

This account captures a dynamic that appeared across participant interviews: the discussion method, as implemented at this site, activates and deepens existing knowledge—it does not build knowledge from scratch. Students who lack prior grammatical grounding are therefore engaged in a performance they cannot yet understand. A second participant reinforced this point from a different angle:

"When the ustadz corrects our reading, I know something is wrong, but I don't understand why it's wrong. There's no explanation of the rule behind it." (Student 7, Interview)

Classroom observation corroborates this finding. In six of the eight observed sessions, instructor explanations were brief and confined primarily to correcting student errors in text reading, with limited explicit modelling of how grammatical rules are derived or applied. Students who produced incorrect readings received corrective feedback but rarely received explanation of the underlying grammatical logic. This places students in a reactive rather than generative learning role, reducing opportunities for deep conceptual processing. From a Vygotskian perspective, this is a critical absence of scaffolding within the ZPD: students are exposed to complex content without the interactional mediation that enables internalisation (Nimasari & Muflihah, 2021; Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). The pattern is consistent with Ismail et al.'s (2025) evidence that unsupported grammar instruction generates cognitive overload, undermining both comprehension and retention.

Table 1 summarises the four primary challenges identified across all data sources.

Table 1: Primary Challenges in Nahwu Instruction at Ma'had IAIN Kerinci

Challenge	Description	Impact on Learning
Insufficient conceptual scaffolding	Instructor explanations confined to error correction; no explicit modelling of rule application	Students cannot follow discussion without prior grammatical grounding; surface-level engagement
Low learning motivation	Theory-heavy instruction disconnected from authentic communicative or religious purpose	Passive participation, avoidance behaviour, and declining investment in grammar study
Abstraction and lack of contextualisation	Grammatical rules presented in isolation from real communicative or textual contexts	Students cannot transfer rule knowledge to reading or producing Arabic-medium text
Methodological misalignment with learner profiles	Discussion method assumes prior knowledge; no provision for digital learning preferences	Learning is procedurally active but conceptually shallow; digital-native students disengage

Note. Data synthesised from interview transcripts, observation field notes, and document analysis.

4.2 Curricular Gaps — Contextualisation and the Limits of Al-Jurumiyah (RQ2)

The second major challenge dimension concerns instructional materials. *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* is a medieval grammatical treatise composed in condensed Arabic prose. Its rule formulations reflect the linguistic conventions of classical Islamic scholarship and are largely divorced from the communicative registers students encounter in their academic or religious daily lives (2021). Student interview data reveal a pervasive perception that Nahwu content, as presented through this text, is abstract and practically inapplicable. Particular difficulty was reported with *na'at-man'ut* (attributive adjective agreement), *idhafah* (genitive construct), *maf'ul bih* (direct object), and *ghairu munsarif* (imperfectly declined nouns).

Students cited insufficient exemplification and the absence of connections to familiar Arabic texts as primary sources of their comprehension difficulties. One student articulated this directly:

“The rules in Al-Jurumiyah make sense when I read them, but then I open the Qur’an and I cannot see where they appear. It feels like two different languages.” (Student 5, Interview)



This account captures what Alamin et al. (2024) describe as a notation literacy gap: students must be explicitly taught the semiotic conventions of *kitab kuning* before they can access the grammatical content those texts encode. Another participant extended this observation to the instructional context:

"In class, we only ever use Al-Jurumiyah. I wish we could see the same rules in hadith or Qur'anic verses. That would make it feel real." (Student 11, Interview)

Observation data confirm that instruction rarely drew on sources beyond Al-Jurumiyah, restricting opportunities for students to observe grammatical rules operating across varied Arabic discourse. Document analysis of the institutional curriculum reveals no formal provision for supplementary materials, technology integration, or alignment between Nahwu content and communicative proficiency levels expected of university graduates. The curriculum prescribes no formative assessment mechanisms through which instructors could identify individual students' ZPD entry points and calibrate scaffolding accordingly. The result is uniform instruction at a fixed pace that serves neither the advanced learner, who is under-challenged, nor the novice, who is overwhelmed.

4.3 Learner Characteristics — Motivational Orientations and Digital Learning Preferences (RQ3)

The third challenge dimension concerns the characteristics and motivational orientations of contemporary learners. Post-millennial university students demonstrate distinctly digital learning preferences, favouring interactive, multimodal, and self-paced learning environments over passive, text-bound instruction (Heriman et al., 2024). The data suggest significant misalignment between these preferences and the current Nahwu instructional model.

Interview participants consistently reported low intrinsic motivation for Nahwu, attributing this to the perceived difficulty of the subject, the repetitive text-only instructional format, and the inability to perceive connections between grammatical knowledge and communicative or religious competence. One participant described this experience as follows:

"I don't really like Nahwu because it's hard to apply in practice." (Student 2, Interview)

A second participant, enrolled in her second year of the programme, described how initial interest had declined over time:

"In the beginning I thought I would understand Nahwu by the end of the year. Now I feel like the more classes I attend, the more confused I become. There's no moment where it clicks." (Student 9, Interview)

Observation data further indicate that classroom dynamics exacerbate motivational disparities. In several observed sessions, higher-proficiency students dominated discussion interactions while lower-proficiency students remained largely silent. When asked about this pattern in post-observation member checking, one instructor acknowledged:

“The stronger students carry the discussion. The weaker ones listen, but I’m not sure they understand what is being discussed.” (Instructor 2, Member Check)

This instructor account aligns with Bećirović et al.’s (2023) finding that collaborative learning structures can privilege students who already possess competence and disengage those who most need support, unless deliberately structured for inclusive participation.

4.4 The Tripartite Challenge: Method, Content, and Learner Characteristics as Mutually Reinforcing Barriers

The findings reveal a systemic tripartite misalignment at *Ma’had* IAIN Kerinci. Participants experienced the discussion-based instructional method as providing insufficient support for their current level of grammatical knowledge. They experienced the exclusive reliance on *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* as limiting their ability to see grammatical rules in operation across familiar texts. And they experienced the classical pedagogical orientation as misaligned with the multimodal, interactive learning environments they find motivationally sustaining.

From a Vygotskian perspective, the core deficit is the absence of effective scaffolding within the ZPD. When instructor support is confined to error correction rather than conceptual mediation, learners navigate complex morphosyntactic structures without the interactional assistance that enables internalisation (Vygotsky, 1978). This is consistent with Nimasari and Muflihah’s (2021) argument that scaffolding must be dialogically structured, responsive to individual learner performance, and gradually released as competence develops—a model whose implementation requires both pedagogical knowledge and diagnostic assessment capacity, neither of which is currently supported by institutional structures at *Ma’had* IAIN Kerinci.

Table 2: Integrative Reform Matrix for Nahwu Instruction at *Ma’had* IAIN Kerinci

Dimension	Identified Limitation	Recommended Reform
Teaching Method	Discussion-based; limited scaffolding; no provision for explicit modelling or graduated support	Integrate guided inquiry, worked-example approaches, and structured peer collaboration with deliberate participation design
Instructional Material	Sole reliance on <i>Matan Al-Jurumiyah</i> ; no supplementary materials; disconnected from communicative purpose	Supplement with Qur’anic examples, Hadith excerpts, and functional academic Arabic discourse; introduce graded exemplification
Learner Characteristics	Mismatch between digital-native learner preferences and	Design collaborative, multimodal, and technology-integrated learning



	text-only, pedagogical approach	teacher-fronted	activities appropriate to infrastructure	Ma'had
Teacher Professional Development	No formal pedagogical training; instructor knowledge confined to classical education experience		Invest in professional development; introduce diagnostic assessment training; embed coaching in practice	

Note. Reform recommendations are derived from thematic analysis cross-referenced with empirical literature.

4.5 Content Contextualisation as a Curricular Priority

The exclusive reliance on *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* is the most readily addressable of the three challenge dimensions, and it compounds the other two. When grammar rules are encountered only in a medieval formulaic text, students lack the comparative textual exposure needed to generalise rules across registers—the very generalisation capacity that independent reading of Arabic-medium texts requires. A contextualised curriculum reform would supplement *Al-Jurumiyah* with exemplification drawn from Qur'anic verses, Prophetic Hadith, and accessible academic Arabic, thereby connecting *Nahwu* to its ultimate religious and communicative functions (Rohmah & Dimyathi, 2024; Wananda & Susilawati, 2024).

This reform has a motivational benefit beyond the pedagogical one. When students recognise the grammatical categories they are studying in verses they recite in daily prayer or in Hadith they study in other subjects, *Nahwu* ceases to be an abstract academic exercise and becomes a tool for religious and scholarly engagement. Alamin et al. (2024) demonstrated that making the semiotic conventions of *kitab kuning* notation explicit—rather than assuming students will absorb them through repeated exposure—significantly improved students' ability to access the grammatical content those texts encode. Addressing this notation literacy systematically, before students encounter *Al-Jurumiyah* proper, would eliminate one of the earliest and most demoralising barriers that current students encounter.

4.6 Technology Integration and 21st-Century Pedagogy

The motivational and engagement challenges identified in this study are partly attributable to the absence of technology-mediated learning. Research in CALL consistently demonstrates that digital tools—interactive grammar applications, animated explanatory sequences, and gamified quiz platforms—can enhance learner motivation, provide immediate formative feedback, and support low-stakes repeated practice (Ekoç, 2021; Keskin et al., 2020). These features address precisely the learning environment preferences of the post-millennial students enrolled at *Ma'had* IAIN Kerinci.

Technology integration, however, must complement rather than replace classical pedagogy. Yul et al. (2023) demonstrate that technology is most effective when deployed purposefully within a coherent instructional framework with clear pedagogical rationale and

sufficient teacher preparation. Technology adoption at *Ma'had* IAIN Kerinci must therefore be accompanied by investment in instructor Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), enabling teachers to translate digital affordances into pedagogically effective Nahwu learning activities (Ventista & Brown, 2023). Without this investment, digital tools are likely to be adopted superficially—as entertainment rather than as structured grammar practice—and their potential learning benefits will not be realised.

4.7 Teacher Professional Development

The findings carry direct implications for teacher professional development that go beyond simple training in new instructional methods. Instructors at *Ma'had* IAIN Kerinci lack both the pedagogical vocabulary to diagnose students' ZPD entry points and the repertoire of scaffolding techniques to address them. Ventista and Brown (2023) demonstrate through systematic review that teacher professional learning has significant downstream effects on student outcomes when development is job-embedded, collaborative, and sustained over time. For Nahwu instructors, this means professional development should address: diagnostic assessment to identify where individual students are in relation to the ZPD; explicit scaffolding techniques including worked-example modelling, think-aloud demonstration, and graduated task sequences; contextualised content design using Qur'anic and Hadith materials; and integration of digital tools for self-paced grammar practice and immediate feedback.

A tiered curriculum model—beginning with heavily scaffolded foundational instruction and progressively releasing responsibility to learners—would operationalise these principles within the *Ma'had* context. The first tier would prioritise notation literacy (following Alamin et al., 2024), foundational ZPD-based scaffolding, and high-contextualisation content. The second tier would introduce structured collaborative discussion with deliberate inclusive participation design. The third tier would integrate CALL-supported independent practice. This progression mirrors the gradual release of responsibility model recommended by developmental learning science and tested in language instruction contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion

This study examined Nahwu instruction at *Ma'had* Al-Jami'ah IAIN Kerinci through an integrative analytical frame that treats methodological, curricular, and learner-characteristic challenges as interdependent rather than separate. The phenomenological data reveal how participants experienced a systemic tripartite misalignment: the discussion-based method as providing insufficient scaffolding for their current level; exclusive reliance on *Matan Al-Jurumiyah* as limiting contextual engagement and perceived relevance; and the classical pedagogical orientation as structurally incongruent with their digital learning preferences and motivational patterns. These dimensions reinforced one another in participants' experience, generating a learning environment in which persistence with Nahwu was described as cognitively demanding and motivationally unrewarding.

Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, the study argues that sustainable reform requires a shift from transmission-oriented teaching toward dialogic, scaffolded, and



contextualised pedagogy operating within students' Zone of Proximal Development. The integrative reform matrix proposed across four dimensions—teaching method, instructional material, learner-characteristic responsiveness, and teacher professional development—provides a coherent, evidence-based framework for curriculum redesign at Ma'had IAIN Kerinci and comparable institutions.

The most immediately actionable reform is curricular: supplementing Al-Jurumiyah with Qur'anic and Hadith exemplification addresses the contextualisation deficit, carries motivational benefits by connecting Nahwu to students' existing religious practice, and requires no specialist equipment or infrastructure investment. A second priority is notation literacy: explicitly teaching students the semiotic conventions of kitab kuning notation before they encounter Al-Jurumiyah proper—following Alamin et al.'s (2024) recommendation—would eliminate one of the earliest barriers participants described. Technology integration, while desirable, is contingent on instructor TPACK development and coherent pedagogical rationale (Yul et al., 2023); without this foundation, digital tools are likely to be adopted superficially without realising their learning potential.

Several limitations shape the scope of the findings. The single-site design restricts transferability, and the absence of quantitative outcome measures prevents causal claims. The sample reflects one programme at one institution in one regional context. The cross-sectional phenomenological design captures participants' experiences at one point in time; longitudinal designs would better capture how motivation and comprehension develop across programme years. Future research should employ mixed-methods or experimental designs to test proposed reform interventions across multiple Ma'had sites. Studies comparing institutions that have integrated technology into Nahwu instruction with those that have not would yield particularly valuable insights into what conditions produce successful adoption.

The central contribution of this study is demonstrating that Nahwu learning challenges in the university-affiliated Ma'had context emerge from a complex interaction of method, content, and learner characteristics—not from student deficiency or content difficulty alone. This systemic understanding calls for theoretically grounded pedagogical reconceptualisation, not incremental adjustment. For Ma'had institutions across Indonesia seeking to equip students for independent engagement with the Islamic scholarly tradition, the evidence presented here suggests that such reconceptualisation is both necessary and achievable within existing resource constraints.

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