**Research Article**

# A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN IMPLEMENTING DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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**Abstract**

The Merdeka Curriculum marks a fundamental paradigm shift in Indonesian education, necessitating a transformation in the teacher's role from that of an instructor to a facilitator of learning. This transition carries profound psychological implications, particularly for Arabic language teachers who face the unique challenge of motivating non-native students. This article, a descriptive qualitative literature review, aims to analyze and synthesize the psychological roles of Arabic language teachers within the context of implementing differentiated learning as mandated by the Merdeka Curriculum. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Constructivism (Piaget & Vygotsky) and Humanistic Psychology (Carl Rogers), this study explores how teachers must evolve from mere transmitters of knowledge into architects of a psychologically safe learning environment. The analysis focuses on the psychological competencies required for teachers to facilitate students' knowledge construction, apply scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and foster an empathetic, non-evaluative classroom climate to reduce language anxiety. The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth synthesis of the pedagogical demands of the Merdeka Curriculum with foundational theories of educational psychology, specifically applied to the context of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Indonesia. The findings from this review indicate that the success of differentiated Arabic language instruction is critically dependent on the psychological readiness of teachers to adopt a new, student-centered identity as a facilitator.

**Keywords**: Constructivism, Differentiated Learning, Educational Psychology, Humanistic Psychology, Merdeka Curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century demands a fundamental change in pedagogical practice, shifting from traditional teacher-centered models to student-centered approaches. In Indonesia, this demand is addressed through the Merdeka Curriculum, an educational framework that emphasizes learning independence, flexibility, and the relevance of content to students' needs and interests (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). A central pillar of the Merdeka Curriculum is the implementation of differentiated learning, a proactive approach wherein teachers adjust the curriculum, learning processes, and evaluation products to meet the diverse needs of learners within a single classroom (Tomlinson, 2014).

The implementation of differentiated learning directly transforms the teacher's role. Teachers are no longer positioned as the sole source of knowledge (the "sage on the stage") but rather as facilitators of learning (the "guide on the side"). This shift is not merely terminological or administrative; it is a psychological revolution that demands a profound change in the mindset, beliefs, and competencies of teachers. Teachers are required to possess a high degree of psychological sensitivity to diagnose learning needs, foster intrinsic motivation, and create an inclusive and emotionally safe classroom environment.

In the context of language instruction, particularly a foreign language like Arabic in Indonesia, this challenge becomes increasingly complex. Arabic language learning is often perceived as a difficult subject, laden with the memorization of grammar (nahwu and sharaf), and presents a psychological and cultural distance for non-Arab students. The phenomenon of language anxiety—defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language learning or use"—stands as one of the most significant psychological barriers in foreign language acquisition (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Without a competent facilitator, Arabic language instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum risks failing to achieve its goal of developing authentic communicative competence.

Although substantial research has addressed the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the teacher's role in general, a literature gap exists concerning the specific and in-depth analysis of the psychological dimensions of this transformation for Arabic language teachers. Many studies tend to focus on technical-pedagogical aspects, such as developing teaching modules or assessments, while inadequately addressing the psychological foundations that underpin the philosophy of the curriculum itself: Constructivism and Humanism.

This article focuses on an in-depth analysis of the shifting role of Arabic language teachers from the perspective of educational psychology within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The primary research questions to be answered through this literature review are: How do the theoretical frameworks of Constructivism (Piaget & Vygotsky) and Humanistic Psychology (Carl Rogers) provide a foundation for transforming the role of Arabic language teachers from instructors to facilitators under the Merdeka Curriculum?, What essential psychological competencies must Arabic language teachers possess to effectively implement differentiated learning and create a supportive learning environment?, How can the role of a facilitator, grounded in educational psychology, help overcome specific challenges in Arabic language learning, such as language anxiety and low student motivation?

Based on the foregoing research questions, the objectives of this literature review are: To analyze and synthesize literature on the required changes in the teacher's role under the Merdeka Curriculum, utilizing the lenses of Constructivist and Humanistic psychology theories. To identify and describe the key psychological competencies that Arabic language teachers must possess as facilitators of differentiated learning. To offer a conceptual framework for the psychological role of the facilitator in Arabic language learning that can minimize affective barriers and maximize student learning potential in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This section presents a synthesis of literature that forms the analytical foundation of this study. The review is organized thematically to construct a coherent argument regarding the psychological role of Arabic language teachers.

The Merdeka Curriculum was designed to address a learning crisis caused, in part, by a uniform approach that ignores student diversity (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Its core philosophy is to grant "freedom" (kemerdekaan) to educational units and teachers to develop curricula suited to local characteristics and needs, and to students to learn according to their developmental phase and interests. At the heart of this curriculum lies the concept of differentiated learning.

Tomlinson (2014) defines differentiated learning as a teaching philosophy based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers account for differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile. Differentiation can be applied to three primary aspects: content (what students learn), process (how students engage with information and ideas), and product (how students demonstrate what they have learned). This approach inherently requires teachers to know their students deeply, not only cognitively but also socio-emotionally (Subban, 2006). Consequently, the teacher's role can no longer be monolithic as an information provider but must be dynamic as a designer and facilitator of diverse learning experiences.

The literature on the teacher's role consistently indicates an evolution from a transmission model to a transformation model. The transmission model, which positions the teacher as an instructor, is based on an objectivist epistemology where knowledge is viewed as a fixed entity that can be transferred from teacher to student (Schunk, 2012). In this model, the teacher is central, and success is measured by how much material the students can absorb.

Conversely, the transformation model views the teacher as a facilitator. This role is rooted in a constructivist epistemology, where knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed by the learner through interaction with the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). As a facilitator, a teacher's primary tasks are: (1) creating an environment rich in learning resources, (2) asking questions that provoke critical thinking, (3) providing appropriate support (scaffolding), and (4) modeling the processes of learning and thinking (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). This role demands a high degree of trust in students' capacity for independent and responsible learning.

Constructivism provides a robust theoretical foundation for the teacher's role as a facilitator. Its two principal figures, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, offer complementary perspectives. Piaget's Cognitive Constructivism: Piaget emphasized that individuals construct mental structures, or schemas, through the processes of assimilation (integrating new information into existing schemas) and accommodation (modifying existing schemas in response to new information). The implication for an Arabic teacher is that new grammar rules or vocabulary cannot simply be "poured" into students' minds. The teacher must facilitate students in connecting new concepts (e.g., the mudhaf-mudhaf ilaih construction) with their pre-existing knowledge, even if it means allowing them to make mistakes as part of the meaning-making process (Piaget, 1970). The teacher's role is to design problems or tasks that trigger "cognitive disequilibrium," prompting students to reconstruct their understanding.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism: Vygotsky (1978) introduced the crucial concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. The ZPD is the distance between a student's actual developmental level (what can be done alone) and the potential developmental level (what can be done with guidance from an adult or more capable peer). The facilitator's role is to operate within this ZPD. Scaffolding is a series of structured supports provided by the teacher to help a student complete a task within their ZPD, which is gradually withdrawn as the student's independence increases. In an Arabic classroom, scaffolding could include providing a list of key vocabulary before a conversation, using graphic organizers to structure a simple essay, or repeatedly modeling the pronunciation of difficult letters. An effective teacher, therefore, is one who can accurately diagnose each student's ZPD and provide appropriate scaffolding—neither too much (which fosters passivity) nor too little (which causes frustration).

While Constructivism focuses on how knowledge is built (the cognitive dimension), Humanistic Psychology focuses on the conditions that enable this construction process (the affective and emotional dimensions). Carl Rogers, a leading figure in this school of thought, argued that significant learning can only occur in a climate free from threats to the self (Rogers, 1969). To create this climate, a facilitator must exhibit three core qualities: Empathic Understanding: The ability to perceive and understand a student's private world as if it were one's own, without ever losing the "as if" quality. An empathetic teacher can understand a student's frustration when struggling to differentiate between the sounds (ص, س, ث) or the embarrassment of mispronouncing a sentence. Unconditional Positive Regard: Valuing a student as a worthy individual, regardless of their immediate behavior or academic performance. This means accepting student errors as a natural part of learning, not as personal failures. This attitude is crucial for reducing language anxiety, as students feel safe to take risks and experiment with the language without fear of judgment or ridicule. Genuineness/Congruence: The teacher is authentic, being themselves without hiding behind a professional facade. The teacher's openness and sincerity build trust, which is the foundation of an effective facilitative relationship (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Indonesia presents unique challenges that underscore the urgency of the teacher's psychological role. Beyond linguistic complexities (e.g., a different writing system, root-word system, and grammar), affective factors are also at play. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three components of language anxiety: (1) fear of negative evaluation from others, (2) communication apprehension, and (3) test anxiety. This anxiety can act as an "affective filter" that blocks comprehensible input from being processed by the brain (Krashen, 1982). A teacher who acts as an authoritarian instructor with a heavy initial emphasis on grammatical accuracy tends to raise this affective filter. In contrast, a facilitator who applies humanistic principles can lower it, creating a safe and motivating learning environment.

The synthesis of this literature review demonstrates that the transformation of the Arabic language teacher's role under the Merdeka Curriculum is not an option, but a necessity. This role must be grounded in a solid psychological foundation, integrating constructivist principles to facilitate cognitive processes and humanistic principles to manage the affective state of students.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the literature review method. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research objective is to deeply understand and interpret the phenomenon of the teacher's shifting psychological role, rather than to measure or statistically generalize findings. The literature review method is deemed most appropriate as

the study aims to analyze, synthesize, and critique the existing body of knowledge on the research topic without collecting primary empirical data.

Data for this research consist of secondary sources, including relevant academic literature and policy documents. These sources include: Official Documents: Guides and frameworks for the Merdeka Curriculum published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek). Scholarly Journal Articles: Articles published in accredited national journals (SINTA) and reputable international journals (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science) with a focus on constructivist learning theory, humanistic psychology, differentiated instruction, the teacher's role, teacher identity, facilitation skills, Arabic language teaching, and language anxiety. Books and Book Chapters: Foundational works from key theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Rogers, as well as authoritative textbooks in the fields of educational psychology and second language acquisition.

A systematic literature search was conducted through digital databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest, and national journal portals. The keywords used in the search included combinations of: "Merdeka Curriculum," "differentiated learning," "role of Arabic teachers," "educational psychology," "constructivism," "Vygotsky," "humanism," "Carl Rogers," "learning facilitator," and "language anxiety in Arabic learning."

To maintain the relevance and quality of the sources, the following criteria were applied: Inclusion Criteria: (a) Publications between 2000-2025 to ensure currency, with a priority on the last decade; (b) Peer-reviewed articles; (c) Literature that explicitly discusses at least one of the key research concepts (e.g., teacher's role, Merdeka Curriculum, Constructivism, Humanism, Arabic language teaching); (d) Literature available in full-text format. Exclusion Criteria: (a) Articles from predatory or non-reputable journals; (b) Opinions, news reports, or non-scholarly writings; (c) Research with a focus too distant from the context of language education or educational psychology.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved several steps: (1) Familiarization: Reading and re-reading the collected literature to gain a comprehensive understanding. (2) Initial Coding: Identifying important ideas, concepts, and quotes from each source and assigning them initial codes. (3) Searching for Themes: Grouping similar codes into potential themes. (4) Reviewing Themes: Reviewing and refining the identified themes to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness. (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Providing clear definitions and representative names for each main theme. (6) Report Writing: Synthesizing the analysis into a coherent narrative, as presented in the Results and Discussion section. This analysis is critical in nature, not merely summarizing but also comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing arguments from various sources to construct new understanding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of relevant literature yielded several key themes that collectively illustrate the complexity of the Arabic language teacher's psychological role as a facilitator within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. This discussion will elaborate on these themes, synthesizing findings from the literature with the specific context of Arabic language instruction.

The literature analysis unequivocally shows that the Merdeka Curriculum requires Arabic teachers to abandon their long-held identity as transmitters of material. This traditional role, rooted in a behaviorist perspective, positions the teacher as an expert who transfers packets of knowledge (vocabulary, grammar rules) into the minds of students, who are seen as empty vessels (Schunk, 2012). This practice often manifests in teaching dominated by lectures, structured drills, and rote memorization, which frequently fails to produce functional communicative competence.

The new role as a facilitator, supported by Constructivist theory, requires the teacher to become an architect of learning experiences. As an architect, the teacher does not build the house for the student but instead provides the blueprint, quality materials, and technical guidance so that students can construct their own "house of knowledge" (Piaget, 1970). In the Arabic classroom, this means designing authentic tasks that challenge students to use the language meaningfully. For instance, rather than merely explaining the rules of fi'il madhi (past tense) and mudhari' (present tense), a facilitator would design a simple project where students create a picture narrative about their activities yesterday (using fi'il madhi) and their plans for tomorrow (using fi'il mudhari'). This process encourages students to actively discover and internalize language patterns, not just memorize them. This shift demands the psychological competencies of cognitive flexibility and pedagogical creativity from the teacher.

One of the most consistent findings from Vygotsky-based literature is the centrality of the ZPD and scaffolding concepts in effective facilitation practice (Vygotsky, 1978). In Arabic language learning, where student proficiency levels within a single class can be highly diverse, applying these concepts is crucial and forms the core of differentiated instruction.

An effective facilitator must possess high diagnostic sensitivity to identify each student's ZPD. This is a fundamental psychological competency. The teacher must be able to observe and listen carefully to understand: "What has Student A already mastered independently?" and "What kind of support does Student A need to reach the next level?". For example, if a student can form simple nominal sentences (jumlah ismiyyah) but struggles with verbal sentences (jumlah fi'liyyah), their ZPD lies in the construction of verbal sentences.

The scaffolding provided must be appropriate and temporary. Examples of scaffolding in an Arabic classroom, identified from a synthesis of the literature, include: Modeling: The teacher demonstrates how to conduct an introductory dialogue, complete with appropriate intonation and body language. Questioning: The teacher asks prompting questions to help a student structure their thoughts while writing an essay (e.g., "What did you do first? Then what happened? Where did it take place?"). Cue Cards: Providing cards with key phrases or images to assist students in participating in role-playing activities. Graphic Organizers: Using concept maps or diagrams to help students organize new vocabulary by theme (e.g., family, school, the market).

A teacher who fails to provide appropriate scaffolding—either by being unable to diagnose the ZPD or by reverting to instructor mode—will create two negative outcomes: boredom (if the task is too easy) or frustration and anxiety (if the task is too difficult). Therefore, the ability to be an "adaptive support provider" is the essence of a facilitator's psychological role.

Findings from the analysis of humanistic psychology literature confirm that cognitive processes in language learning are inseparable from the student's affective state. As emphasized by Rogers (1969) and Krashen (1982) with his affective filter hypothesis, a learning environment that is stressful, evaluative, and judgmental will increase anxiety and hinder language acquisition. This is highly relevant for Arabic, where students often feel intimidated by its writing system, pronunciation, and grammatical complexity.

The teacher's psychological role as a facilitator here is to be the creator of a psychologically safe classroom climate. This climate is built upon three Rogerian pillars: The Practice of Empathy: The teacher actively demonstrates an understanding of the student's difficulties. When a student mispronounces the letter 'ayn (ع) as a simple 'a', an empathetic teacher would not correct sharply but might say, "I know this letter is difficult because we don't have it in Indonesian. Let's try it together. Watch the shape of my mouth." This response validates the student's feelings and reduces shame. The Manifestation of Unconditional Positive Regard: This is perhaps the most challenging yet impactful psychological competency. The teacher must be able to separate a student's linguistic error from their self-worth. Every communicative attempt, even one full of mistakes, should be valued as a step forward. The

teacher might use phrases like, "Thank you for trying, I understand what you mean," before offering constructive feedback. This attitude directly attacks the root of language anxiety: the fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Being a Genuine Teacher: A teacher who shows their human side—for instance, by admitting that they also found language learning difficult or even by occasionally making a mistake—will connect more easily with students. This authenticity breaks down the rigid hierarchy between "expert" and "novice," fostering a more egalitarian and collaborative relationship.

By integrating the three themes above, the psychological role of the Arabic language teacher under the Merdeka Curriculum can be synthesized as that of a bicultural facilitator and affective mediator.

As a bicultural facilitator, the teacher not only teaches the language but also bridges the student's cultural world with Arab culture. This goes beyond introducing food or clothing; it involves delving into ways of thinking and communicating that are internalized in the language. The teacher helps students understand why there are different forms of address for males and females, or why certain expressions are commonly used. This adds a dimension of meaning and relevance, which is key to interest-based differentiated learning.

As an affective mediator, the teacher proactively manages the emotional climate in the classroom. The teacher becomes an affective "thermostat," ensuring the classroom "temperature" remains warm, supportive, and conducive to risk-taking. This competency demands high emotional intelligence from the teacher: the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions and to recognize and positively influence students' emotions. The teacher consciously works to lower the students' "affective filter," allowing the Arabic language input they receive to be optimally processed for language acquisition.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the successful implementation of differentiated learning in Arabic language instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum is critically dependent on the psychological readiness of teachers. The transformation from instructor to facilitator is an internal journey involving a shift in beliefs, the development of diagnostic sensitivity, the mastery of scaffolding techniques, and, most importantly, the ability to build authentic and supportive human relationships with every student.

## CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that the implementation of differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum demands a fundamental and profound role transformation for Arabic language teachers: from instructor to facilitator. This shift is more than a technical-pedagogical adjustment; it is a psychological revolution. Based on an analysis grounded in Constructivist and Humanistic psychology theories, the key points of the Arabic teacher's psychological role as a facilitator can be summarized as follows: Teachers must evolve from being transmitters of knowledge to architects of learning experiences, designing meaningful tasks so students can actively construct their own understanding of the Arabic language. Effective facilitation centers on the teacher's ability to diagnose a student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and provide adaptive, timely scaffolding, which is the essence of differentiated learning. To overcome significant affective barriers like language anxiety, teachers must be able to create a psychologically safe classroom climate by applying humanistic principles: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness. In synthesis, the ideal psychological role of the Arabic teacher in the Merdeka era is that of an affective mediator who manages the classroom's emotional climate and a bicultural facilitator who makes learning relevant and meaningful.

The novelty of this article lies in its strong emphasis on the psychological foundations of the facilitator's role—which are often overlooked in technical discussions of the Merdeka Curriculum—and its specific application to the unique challenges of Arabic language learning.

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