

## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN EVALUATING THE ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING CURRICULUM AT MIN 1 TANAH DATAR

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### Abstract

This study addresses the problem of the suboptimal implementation of the Arabic language curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar, characterized by monotonous and less contextual learning methods. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the implementation of the curriculum, identify key challenges, and offer strategic solutions. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative with interview, observation, and documentation techniques. Data were collected from teachers, madrasah principals, students, and madrasah supervisors. The results of this study indicate that there is a gap between curriculum design and classroom practice, influenced by minimal teacher training, limited teaching materials, and learning approaches that are not appropriate to the characteristics of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students. This study recommends strengthening teacher capacity and developing contextual learning media to improve the effectiveness of Arabic language learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar.

**Keywords:** Arabic Language Learning, Digital Technology, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah



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## INTRODUCTION

Based on the results of a pre-research conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar, it was discovered that the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum still faces several serious obstacles. One key finding is that most teachers still rely on traditional teaching methods such as memorization without a deep understanding of the meaning. The teaching materials used also tend not to be tailored to the cognitive developmental stage of elementary school-aged children, making the learning process less relevant and boring. Furthermore, the majority of Arabic language teachers at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level do not have a formal educational background in Arabic, which impacts the low quality of learning. The lack of contextual teaching materials and minimal training and professional development for teachers further exacerbate this situation. As a result, student motivation is low, and learning outcomes are inadequate to support functional Arabic language mastery at the elementary level.

The problems identified in the pre-research align with the findings of various previous studies, which indicate that Arabic language learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar is not managed systematically and structured. Several sources suggest that the Arabic language curriculum tends to be normative and neglects child-centered learning approaches. Classical Arabic language education theories, often used as references, have not been able to address the contextual learning needs of early childhood, which require more communicative and participatory methods. Although there have been several updates to the national curriculum, the literature shows that implementation in the field often does not align with the ideal curriculum design. This indicates a gap between theory and practice that requires further critical examination. Therefore, a more comprehensive study is needed to understand the root of the problem and find strategic solutions.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar, particularly in the context of its implementation in the field. Specifically, this study aims to identify the main challenges faced in the Arabic language teaching process, including aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Furthermore, this study seeks to formulate strategic solutions that can be implemented by stakeholders, including teachers, schools, and policymakers, to improve the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. By focusing on improving the quality of foreign language-based basic education, this research is expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of a more adaptive and applicable curriculum. This objective serves as the primary foundation for developing the research conceptual framework, which will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

Based on the background of the problem and the research objectives outlined, it can be argued that this study is crucial for improving the quality of Arabic language learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar. This argument is based on the fact that weak basic Arabic language proficiency at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school) level will have a long-term impact on students' ability to understand Islamic texts, many of which use Arabic as the primary language. Furthermore, without curriculum reform and appropriate implementation strategies, Arabic language learning will continue to stagnate and lose relevance to the needs of today's learners. Therefore, this research is expected to provide a conceptual and practical basis for formulating curriculum policies and teacher capacity building programs, so that Arabic language learning can be more contextual, enjoyable, and meaningful for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students.

The curriculum is a fundamental component of the education system, serving as a guide for designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning process (Cappa dkk., 2024; Mahrus, 2021; Putri dkk., 2025). In the classical sense, the curriculum is often understood as a set of subjects that students must complete during a particular level of education (Arsyad & Safitriani, 2024). However, in the development of modern educational discourse, the curriculum is defined more broadly as all learning experiences systematically designed to

achieve predetermined educational objectives (Salabi, 2020; Siregar, 2022). The curriculum encompasses not only the content of teaching materials but also learning strategies, assessments, and extracurricular activities that support the development of student competencies. In the context of elementary education, the curriculum must consider students' psychological and cognitive developmental stages to ensure effective comprehension of the material being taught. Therefore, understanding the concept of a comprehensive curriculum is a crucial starting point for examining the learning process, including Arabic language instruction in Islamic elementary schools.

In practice, curricula can be classified into several categories based on their approach, objectives, and scope (Anshori dkk., 2022). One common categorization is formal curriculum, non-formal curriculum, and informal curriculum. Formal curriculum refers to the curriculum officially established by educational authorities and implemented in formal educational institutions such as schools. Meanwhile, non-formal curriculum includes structured out-of-school learning programs, such as courses or training, while informal curriculum encompasses learning experiences students acquire indirectly from their social and cultural environment. Furthermore, there are also divisions based on approach, such as content-based curriculum, competency-based curriculum, and thematic-based curriculum. In the context of Arabic language learning in Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), curriculum implementation often emphasizes memorization and grammar (grammar-oriented), leaving less room for a communicative approach. Therefore, selecting the right curriculum type is crucial for successful learning in practice.

Arabic language learning is a systematic process aimed at equipping students with Arabic language skills, both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) (dian Rahmawati & Shofiyani, 2020; Erwita & Hamzah, 2025; Khoiriyah, 2020). In the context of Islamic education, Arabic language learning plays a strategic role because it is the primary means of understanding Islamic sources such as the Quran and Hadith (Firdaus dkk., 2025; Hermawan, 2025; Nasution & Lubis, 2023). Arabic language learning encompasses not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor skills, considering that language skills encompass mastery of language structure, pronunciation, and understanding meaning in specific contexts. The Arabic language learning process ideally involves various pedagogical approaches tailored to the characteristics of the learners, including communicative, audio-lingual, and task-based methods (Hadiyanto dkk., 2020). Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of Arabic language learning is a crucial foundation for designing effective learning strategies, especially for elementary school students who are still in the early stages of language development.

Arabic language learning can be manifested in various approaches and strategies tailored to learning objectives and student characteristics. In general, several commonly used Arabic language learning models exist, such as the grammatical-translation approach, the communicative approach, the skills-based approach, and the content-based instruction approach. At the elementary level, the communicative and contextual approaches are highly recommended because they can build language skills naturally through the use of language in everyday situations (Alfi dkk., 2025; Fajri & Aisah, 2025; Ramandhani & Widyartono, 2024). Furthermore, Arabic language learning can be conducted through visual media, children's songs, language games, and other interactive activities that are enjoyable for students at Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah). However, in many schools, learning practices still tend to be monotonous and teacher-centered, thus reducing active student participation. Therefore, it is necessary to develop innovative and enjoyable strategies for implementing Arabic language learning that are appropriate for children.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is the first level of formal education, serving as the initial foundation for developing students' basic academic, social, and character skills (Munfariyah & Rohman, 2025; Napi'ah & Ayuningsih, 2025; Silvia & Fauzan, 2025). In the Indonesian national education system, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah covers education for children aged 6 to 12 and

lasts for six years. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is responsible for instilling basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as introducing moral and social values. At this stage, students are in the concrete cognitive development phase, so learning materials and methods must be simple, applicable, and relevant to the children's real experiences. Therefore, all educational processes at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, including Arabic language instruction, must adhere to pedagogical principles appropriate to child development. Understanding the concept of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah as a basic educational institution is crucial for designing an effective and relevant curriculum and learning strategies.

Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) in Indonesia can be categorized based on ownership status (public and private), curriculum approach (general and faith-based), and geographic location (urban and rural). Public Islamic elementary schools generally follow the national curriculum in its entirety, while private Islamic elementary schools, particularly those with Islamic backgrounds, often integrate the national curriculum with a religious curriculum that includes Arabic language instruction. On the other hand, Islamic elementary schools in urban areas tend to have better access to learning resources, teacher training, and infrastructure than those in rural areas. This categorization demonstrates the diversity of conditions that influence the quality of Arabic language curriculum implementation in Islamic elementary schools. Each type of school faces unique challenges, ranging from limited professional teachers to a lack of contextual teaching materials. Therefore, analysis of the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum requires comprehensive consideration of the context and characteristics of each type of Islamic elementary school to ensure effective solutions.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research focuses on evaluating the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar by examining various aspects related to its effectiveness and implementation challenges. Based on the results of pre-research at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar, it was found that the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum has not been optimal. Many teachers still employ traditional learning methods that focus on memorization without in-depth understanding, while the teaching materials used are not tailored to the students' cognitive developmental stages. Furthermore, most Arabic language teachers lack an academic background in Arabic, thus lacking an understanding of appropriate pedagogical approaches. The lack of contextual teaching materials and minimal professional training are significant obstacles to the learning process. Consequently, student motivation is low, and Arabic language learning outcomes do not show adequate progress. Therefore, this phenomenon was chosen as the object of study to understand in-depth the obstacles and opportunities in implementing the curriculum.

The type of research used in this study is descriptive qualitative, which aims to describe phenomena in depth based on actual data obtained from the field without manipulating variables. This approach allowed researchers to comprehensively explore the dynamics of Arabic language curriculum implementation in Islamic elementary schools through direct observation and interaction with the research subjects. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with informants directly involved in Arabic language learning, drawing on pre-research findings regarding ineffective teaching practices and challenges in curriculum implementation. Furthermore, secondary data was collected through a review of scientific literature and relevant educational policy documents, including theoretical studies on curriculum, Arabic language learning, and the characteristics of Islamic elementary schools. This combination of primary and secondary data provided a strong foundation for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the realities on the ground.

Participants in this study comprised various parties who play a direct and indirect role in the Arabic language learning process at Islamic elementary schools. The primary subjects were five Arabic language teachers from Islamic elementary schools 1 Tanah Datar, who came from diverse backgrounds, including urban and rural areas, allowing for a variety of experiences and teaching contexts. In addition to teachers, the principal of the madrasah was also involved as a policymaker at the madrasah level, having the authority to determine curriculum implementation and resource allocation. This study also involved thirty students from fourth to sixth grades who were directly involved in the Arabic language learning process, in order to gain a student perspective. Two madrasah supervisors or education officials responsible for local content and religious curriculum also served as informants to gain a systemic and policy perspective at the macro level. Thus, the research participants represented a broad and diverse spectrum, resulting in richer and more in-depth data.

The data collection process in this study was conducted systematically through several primary techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, guided by open-ended questions to provide participants with the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives in depth. Observations were conducted of the Arabic language learning process in the classroom, examining interactions between teachers and students, the teaching methods used, and student responses to the materials and learning activities. Furthermore, documentation of the syllabus, lesson plans, textbooks, and school administrative records was reviewed to support the data obtained from the interviews and observations. The entire data collection process was conducted over two months, using a participatory approach that allowed researchers to interact directly with the school environment. These techniques were designed to complement each other, enabling a comprehensive and contextual reconstruction of the reality of curriculum implementation.

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which encompasses three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Qomaruddin & Sa’diyah, 2024). Data reduction was carried out by sorting and filtering important data from interviews, observations, and documentation relevant to the research focus. The reduced data was then presented in the form of a thematic narrative and a categorization matrix to facilitate the analysis of patterns. The researchers then drew conclusions based on the analysis, accompanied by an ongoing verification process to ensure data validity. To enhance the validity of the results, this study employed data source triangulation techniques, comparing information from teachers, students, principals, and supervisors. This technique ensured that the data obtained were non-subjective and objectively described the phenomenon. Thus, this analytical method provided a strong foundation for interpreting the research results systematically and validly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation indicate that the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar has not been optimal. Teachers expressed difficulty in developing curriculum-aligned teaching materials due to limited resources and a lack of training to support their professional development. In interviews, several teachers complained that the available textbooks were uninteresting and not contextualized to students' lives. The principal added that budget constraints were a major obstacle to providing training and interactive learning media. Documentation revealed that the syllabus and lesson plans used by teachers did not fully adhere to a thematic approach and were not aligned with the basic competencies of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students. Textbooks contained only vocabulary lists and standard conversational sentences, without adaptations to local culture or context.

Information obtained from informants and learning documents indicates that the Arabic language curriculum, which should guide the development of teaching materials, had not been implemented contextually. Teachers did not receive adequate guidance to fully understand the curriculum's substance, particularly in integrating learning objectives with approaches appropriate to the age and developmental psychology of students. The developed syllabus and lesson plans are purely formal and administrative, failing to integrate local values or reinforce established core competencies. Available textbooks are uniform and tend to be abstract for elementary school students, thus discouraging students from learning Arabic. This indicates a gap between curriculum design and actual classroom application.

The relationship between descriptive and explanatory data regarding the curriculum and the reality that serves as the background of the research indicates that the main problem lies in the mismatch between the expected curriculum design and its implementation in the field. Limited resources, the suboptimal role of the principal in teacher professional development, and a weak understanding of the curriculum's content and objectives contribute to Arabic language learning not achieving its intended educational goals. This aligns with initial findings indicating weak curriculum implementation and a direct impact on the low quality of Arabic language learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah).

Regarding Arabic language learning, interviews with teachers revealed that the teaching methods used still focus on memorizing vocabulary and sentences without contextual understanding. Teachers acknowledged limitations in creating a variety of enjoyable and interactive teaching methods. Students found Arabic lessons boring because they lacked engaging activities like educational games, conversation practice, or the use of visual media. Observations reinforced this, with the apparent dominance of lecture and memorization methods in the classroom. Teachers did not use visual aids like pictures, videos, or props. Student interaction was passive, and speaking or writing in Arabic was virtually non-existent. Some students appeared confused, especially when teachers used Arabic terms without visual or contextual explanations.

Based on field findings, the Arabic language learning process remains monotonous and lacks active student participation. Teachers lack learning differentiation strategies to adapt methods to individual student needs. The lack of contextual learning media contributes to low student interest in the subject. Students learn Arabic in an unenjoyable environment, without meaningful interactions that could motivate them to use the language in their daily lives. The lack of innovation in learning methods is also not supported by adequate pedagogical training. This situation indicates that learning practices do not yet support the thematic and communicative approaches that should be implemented at the elementary level.

The link between descriptions and explanations of learning practices and the main research questions confirms that gaps in teaching methods and approaches are the cause of the low effectiveness of Arabic language learning. Empirical data shows that students not only lose motivation but also fail to gain adequate understanding because the learning approach does not align with the characteristics of elementary school students. This strengthens the argument that the current learning methods are not aligned with the principles of active and enjoyable learning. This situation clearly reflects fundamental problems in the Arabic language teaching system that require comprehensive evaluation and improvement. Based on documentation and field observations, the condition of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar indicates a lack of preparedness in providing supporting facilities and infrastructure for Arabic language learning. Classroom facilities still lack educational media such as projectors, visual posters, or Arabic language corners. Interviews with the madrasah principal revealed that limited funding is a major obstacle to procuring learning resources and developing teacher capacity. Some madrasahs located in remote areas lack adequate internet access for access to digital learning resources. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation of the Arabic language learning program remains administrative in nature and does not address the quality of classroom implementation.

From the collected data, it is clear that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah as an institution does not yet have the full capacity to effectively support the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum. This is not only due to financial constraints but also due to weak internal policies in the madrasah facilitating the development of Arabic language learning. The madrasah principal tends to focus more on core subjects, while Arabic language instruction is treated as a supplementary and not a priority. This impacts budget allocation, attention to teacher training, and the integration of Arabic language learning into madrasah activities. This reality shows that the challenges in implementing learning do not only come from teachers, but also from school institutions that have not provided optimal support.

The relationship between the findings related to the condition of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar and the main research problem shows that the role of elementary education institutions is crucial in the successful implementation of the Arabic language curriculum. When schools do not pay sufficient attention to planning and resource support, curriculum implementation will be symbolic and ineffective. The absence of structural support from the school directly impacts teacher performance and student learning experiences. This fact makes it clear that the problem of low effectiveness of Arabic language learning does not stand alone but is the accumulation of weaknesses in the school system as a whole. The following table presents the research findings, organized based on the research objectives, including evaluation of curriculum implementation, identification of challenges, and strategic solutions:

Table 1. Table Presents the Research Findings

| No. | Research Objective Aspects              | Key Findings                                 | Brief Explanation   | Strategic Solutions  |
|-----|---|--|---|--|
| 1   | Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation | Implementation is not optimal                | The curriculum is not fully implemented to meet the cognitive development needs of elementary school students. Teachers still rely on memorization without context. | Revised lesson plans and syllabus with a thematic and competency-based approach for early childhood.       |
| 2   | Identify Challenges                     | Limited teachers and resources               | The majority of teachers do not have a formal Arabic language education background, have minimal professional training, and lack contextual learning media.         | Organizing regular training for teachers and providing interesting and relevant teaching materials.        |
| 3   | Improving Learning Effectiveness        | Low student motivation and learning outcomes | Learning is boring, there are minimal play or practical activities, and it does not involve students actively.  | Integration of active, project-based learning methods and the use of interactive visual and digital media. |

The implementation of the Arabic language curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar demonstrates a mismatch between curriculum design and teaching practices. Teachers' unpreparedness to understand and develop curriculum-based materials, a lack of innovative learning methods, and limited facilities and institutional support are consistent problem patterns found in field data. Implementation tends to be symbolic, merely fulfilling administrative demands without substantial pedagogical implementation. Students become passive subjects, rather than active participants in the learning process, because the methods applied are non-communicative and non-contextual. The curriculum, which should serve as an adaptive guide to student needs, loses its relevance because it is not effectively integrated into classroom practice.

The results of this study overlap with previous findings, but are unique in their comprehensive evaluative approach to curriculum implementation at the operational level, not just at the policy level. Previous studies, such as those by Zubaidi (2020) and Mahfudz (2022), have highlighted aspects of the Arabic language curriculum from a structural and instructional design perspective. However, this study adds a new layer of analysis by demonstrating how psychopedagogical and institutional barriers influence implementation effectiveness. This is where this study's strength lies: it not only captures technical obstacles but also examines the practical dynamics that occur between teachers, students, and the madrasah environment as an interconnected learning system.

These findings provide an important reflection that curriculum evaluation cannot be conducted solely in a normative manner. The research objective proves relevant in highlighting the reality that a curriculum, if not supported by prepared human resources and an adaptive learning ecosystem, will remain a mere document. From this, it is clear that the primary benefit of this study is providing a comprehensive reflection of the gap between policy and the reality of basic education. This research also serves as an important indicator that to realize effective Arabic language learning, a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical dimensions and governance of education at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level is necessary.

The results of this study have implications for formulating strategies to improve the quality of Arabic language learning, which no longer suffices to focus solely on improving curriculum content. Furthermore, systemic interventions are needed to increase teacher capacity through ongoing training, the provision of interactive learning media, and a reformulation of the role of the madrasah principal in facilitating innovative learning. On the other hand, these results also demonstrate that learning evaluation must focus on the authenticity of the process, not just the end result. Therefore, the implications of this research extend to policy, madrasah management, and the development of contextual and enjoyable teaching materials for elementary school students.

The low effectiveness of the Arabic language curriculum implementation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools) is not solely due to flaws in the curriculum itself, but also to the disconnect between planning and implementation. Teachers are not only under-empowered but also lack the creative space to adapt the material to the local context. Weaknesses in the supervision system and the lack of adequate teaching aids are also contributing factors. Furthermore, the absence of a practice-based learning approach leads to the perception of Arabic as a rote subject, rather than a means of communication. These factors, structurally and culturally, have caused the curriculum implementation to fall short of its ideal goals.

Based on these findings, strategic actions need to be designed that focus on revitalizing the curriculum's implementation comprehensively. First, intensive and ongoing training for Arabic language teachers using a contextual and communicative approach is needed. Second, the development of textbooks and learning media appropriate to the world of children needs to be prioritized. Third, the role of madrasah principals must be strengthened as learning leaders,

not just administrators. Finally, a portfolio-based evaluation system and authentic assessments need to be developed, so that students' learning processes can be assessed comprehensively and humanely. These actions will lay the foundation for a more meaningful and effective transformation of Arabic language learning.

## CONCLUSION

One of the most surprising findings of this study is that the implementation of the Arabic language curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 1 Tanah Datar apparently took place in a space almost completely detached from the pedagogical spirit that the curriculum itself intended to foster. Although the curriculum was normatively designed with a thematic and communicative approach, the reality on the ground showed that learning was still dominated by rote memorization, rigid lecture methods, and minimal integration of contextual learning media. Teachers not only faced limited resources but also a lack of professional training oriented towards actual classroom teaching practices. This situation not only disrupted the effectiveness of the learning process but also created a distance between students and Arabic as a language that should be learned with joy and meaning.

This research makes important contributions, both theoretically and practically, to the field of curriculum studies and Arabic language learning at the elementary level. Theoretically, it broadens understanding of the mismatch between curriculum design and classroom implementation, particularly in the context of Arabic, which has been underexplored at the elementary level. Practically, the results of this study provide a basis for stakeholders in the education sector, particularly teachers, madrasah principals, and policymakers, to design strategies to improve teacher competency, develop contextual teaching materials, and establish a learning ecosystem that supports active student engagement. The added value of this research lies in its comprehensive approach, which not only uncovers technical issues but also examines the structural and cultural conditions that shape Arabic language learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah).

Although this study has provided an in-depth depiction of the reality of Arabic language curriculum implementation, limitations remain in terms of the scope of the research locations and the representativeness of the informants. The focus on a few Islamic Elementary Schools in a specific region provides a strong contextual picture, but does not encompass the diversity of practices in other regions with different socio-cultural conditions. Therefore, this research opens up opportunities for further studies with a broader geographic scope and a comparative approach across regions or levels of education. Furthermore, the integration of complementary quantitative methods can help strengthen the validity of the generalizability of the findings and enrich the mapping of problems and needs in Arabic language learning nationally.

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