



ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE BASIC ARABIC LITERACY OF STUDENTS AT PONDOK PESANTREN BUSTANIL INSHAF IN TELUK RENDAH PASAR VILLAGE

Kamilatul Parida, Helty, Neldi Harianto³, and Helmun Jamil⁴

¹ Universitas Jambi, Indonesia

² Universitas Jambi, Indonesia

³ Universitas Jambi, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Jambi, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Kamilatul Parida,

Department of Arabic language education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Jambi

Mendalo Campus, Jalan Jambi - Muara Bulian, Mendalo Indah, Kecamatan Jambi Luar Kota, Kabupaten Muaro Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia

Email: kamilatulparida@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the internal and external factors affecting students' basic Arabic literacy at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf in Teluk Rendah Pasar Village. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The research participants consisted of four students with varying characteristics of literacy difficulty, one Arabic language teacher, and the head of the *pondok pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). The results showed that internal factors, including high intrinsic motivation, a *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (Islamic Elementary School) background, and consistent independent study habits, supported basic Arabic literacy. Physical fatigue and linguistic difficulties in reading *kitab gundul* (unvowelized Arabic texts) and memorizing *mufrodlat* (vocabulary) emerged as major barriers. External factors such as an intensive curriculum and morning *muhadatsah* (conversation) activities facilitated literacy development, whereas inconsistent implementation of the Arabic-speaking ecosystem (*bi'ah arabiyah*), limited digital infrastructure, and weak institutional collaboration hindered language acquisition. The novelty of this study lies in identifying a sustainable reinforcing cycle between personal motivation and the ecosystem of a rural *pondok pesantren*. The findings suggest that *pondok pesantren* should systematically expand mandatory Arabic-speaking zones to strengthen the natural internalization of students' basic Arabic literacy.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Basic Literacy, External Factors, Internal Factors, *Pondok Pesantren*



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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental pillars of national development. In the Indonesian context, religious education plays a significant role in shaping the character and morality of the younger generation. *Pondok pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) represent a unique institutional model that preserves classical scholarly traditions while adapting to educational modernization (Dhofier, 2011). In this context, learning Arabic is essential because it is the language of the Qur'an and Hadith, the primary sources of Islamic teachings. Islam also emphasizes the importance of reading and writing, as literacy is deeply rooted in its teachings (Felsenthal & Agbaria, 2023).

Traditionally, *pondok pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) have relied on memorization and teacher-centered instruction to develop students' basic Arabic literacy (Arsyad, 2010). In this context, mastery of sentence structure and vocabulary is achieved not through active communication but through the memorization of classical grammatical rules under the teacher's full authority (Rathomi, 2019). With the emergence of digital technologies, there is an increasing need to integrate technology-based learning strategies to support the development of Arabic literacy (Wahyuni & Rosyidi, 2021).

Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf (Bustanil Inshaf Islamic Boarding School) in Teluk Rendah Pasar Village, Tebo Regency, Jambi Province, faces challenges in ensuring adequate basic Arabic literacy among its students. Based on preliminary observations and pre-survey data, indications of varying and, in some cases, low levels of basic literacy proficiency were identified among students. These challenges were reflected in difficulties in reading vowelized Arabic texts fluently and accurately (*qira'ah*), writing Arabic words (*kitabah*), and mastering basic vocabulary (*mufradat*) and simple grammatical rules (*qawa'id*).

These difficulties are influenced by two main variables: internal factors, including motivation, interest, educational background, and physical condition, and external factors, including teachers' instructional methods, educational facilities, family environment, and the Arabic-speaking ecosystem (*bi'ah arabiyah*) within the *pondok pesantren*. Previous studies have emphasized that internal factors, such as intrinsic motivation, are more effective than external pressures, such as examinations, in supporting learning outcomes (Ibrahim, 2020). External factors, including limited digital facilities and an unsupportive language environment, have also been reported to constrain literacy development (Al-Jarf, 2010; Alramamneh et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the dynamic interactions between internal and external factors influencing basic Arabic literacy at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to describe and interpret, in depth, the phenomenon of basic Arabic literacy difficulties at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf, without manipulation or intervention. This approach focuses on understanding the context and meanings deeply rooted in the social phenomenon under investigation and generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observed behaviors, thereby providing a holistic and contextually rich description of the phenomenon (Emzir, 2014).

Research Target/Subject

The informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling to obtain in-depth information. The research participants consisted of two

groups: four active *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic Senior High School) students who showed varying characteristics of difficulties in learning Arabic, including challenges in mastering *mufrodat* (vocabulary), reading *kitab gundul* (unvowelized Arabic texts), constructing sentences, and connecting Arabic letters; one Arabic language teacher; and the head of the *pondok pesantren*.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was divided into three main stages. The initial stage included determining the research focus, obtaining official permission from the university and the *pondok pesantren*, and preparing the research guide instruments. The implementation stage involved establishing rapport through prolonged engagement at the *pondok pesantren* while simultaneously collecting data. The final stage included data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and conducting member checks with the informants.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Primary and secondary data were collected directly by the researcher as the key instrument through three techniques: (1) In-Depth Interviews: A flexible structured interview guide was used to explore students' perspectives on self-motivation and teachers' perspectives on instructional methods, (2) Observation: Classroom teaching and learning activities, as well as the implementation of the Arabic-speaking ecosystem (*bi'ah arabiyah*) within the dormitory environment, were observed, (3) Documentation: Curriculum documents, syllabi, lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran*; RPP), academic records, and samples of students' handwritten work were collected.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing data obtained from students, the Arabic language teacher, and the head of the *pondok pesantren* (*mudir*), as well as technique triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, direct observations, and written documents.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique adopted an interactive qualitative model that was conducted simultaneously throughout the data collection process and included the following stages: (1) Data Reduction: The process of selecting, simplifying, and categorizing raw data obtained from interviews and observations into themes related to internal and external factors, (2) Data Display: The process of organizing data into thick descriptive narratives and matrices illustrating the relationships among variables to facilitate the identification of patterns and causal relationships, (3) Conclusion Drawing/Verification: The process of formulating tentative conclusions that were continuously cross-checked against field data and triangulation findings until data saturation was achieved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Internal factors are conditions, characteristics, and capacities that come from students themselves. Based on the interview findings, several internal factors were identified as significantly influencing students' basic Arabic literacy at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf. Motivation and Interest in Learning. Learning motivation emerged as the most dominant internal factor. The interview findings revealed varying levels of motivation among the students. One student expressed strong enthusiasm for learning Arabic, perceiving it as the "key to knowledge" and with the clear goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the Qur'an's meanings. Another student demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation, aiming to read and comprehend *kitab kuning* fluently, including the ability to identify the functions of *fa'il*

(subject) and *maf'ul* (object) without relying on *harakat* (vowel markings). The Arabic language teacher confirmed that students who learned based on their own interest showed greater enthusiasm than those who learned solely out of obligation. This finding is consistent with Ibrahim (2020), who reported that intrinsic motivation is more effective than external pressure.

Table 1. Impact of Students' Educational Background on Arabic Literacy Pace

Yes	Assessment Aspects	Category	Yes
Madrasah Ibtidaiyah graduates	Yes	Yes	Fast
General Elementary graduates (no religious education)	No	No	Slow

Educational Background. Students' educational background also influenced the pace of Arabic literacy acquisition. The teacher identified significant differences between students who graduated from *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (Islamic Elementary School) and those who graduated from general Elementary Schools. Students with a *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* background were generally familiar with the Arabic script and possessed basic reading skills, whereas those from general Elementary Schools who had not attended religious education programs had to start from scratch and required a longer adaptation period. This finding is consistent with KhatibAbbas and Lipka (2025), who emphasized that vocabulary mastery and basic linguistic competence are among the most critical internal cognitive predictors of literacy success.

Independent Study Habits. Independent study habits contributed positively to students' literacy development. The students regularly reviewed their *mufrodat* after the *Asar* prayer, in the morning before attending classes, or before going to bed for 10–20 minutes. The Arabic language teacher confirmed that most students at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf were already accustomed to reading and memorizing the Qur'an independently.

Learning Difficulties. Various specific difficulties were identified in the acquisition of basic Arabic literacy. One student reported that the primary challenge was memorizing *mufrodat*, particularly when words had similar meanings, as a single word could carry multiple meanings depending on the sentence context. Another student identified the greatest difficulty as reading *kitab gundul*, especially in distinguishing between *fi'il madhi* (past tense verb) and *fi'il mudhari'* (present/future tense verb), as well as difficulties in *istima'* (listening) activities due to the similarity in the pronunciation of certain *hijaiyah* letters. Other students had difficulty applying *harakat* and constructing Arabic sentences. This diversity of challenges indicates that basic Arabic literacy is multidimensional, consistent with the findings of Saiegh-Haddad and Schiff (2024), who reported that morphological awareness in spoken Arabic is the strongest predictor of reading comprehension in Standard Arabic.

Physical Condition and Concentration. Due to the school's intensive daily schedule, nearly all interviewed students reported internal challenges, including physical fatigue and drowsiness during class hours. Several students coped with these challenges by asking their peers to pinch them or by using medicated oil, while others briefly left the classroom to wash their faces. This finding supports the view of Wulandari et al. (2025), who identified physiological factors as one of the causes of difficulties in learning Arabic that warrant serious attention.

Teacher Competence and Instructional Methods. The *pondok pesantren's* policy of prioritizing teachers with an educational background in Arabic language studies reflects an institutional awareness of the importance of professional teaching competence. In line with this, (Helty, et al., 2025) demonstrates that enhancing teachers' communication competence and their awareness of language politeness can effectively improve students' basic literacy. This is

because a teacher's communication is a key component of successful literacy instruction. Through effective communication, teachers can crucially enhance students' reading, writing, and numeracy skills. In practice, teachers apply word-stringing and vocabulary memorization methods for beginner students, while more advanced students are trained to use dictionaries to interpret sentences. Learning media are predominantly whiteboards and the Munawwir dictionary, with occasional use of word cards to create variety in the learning atmosphere.

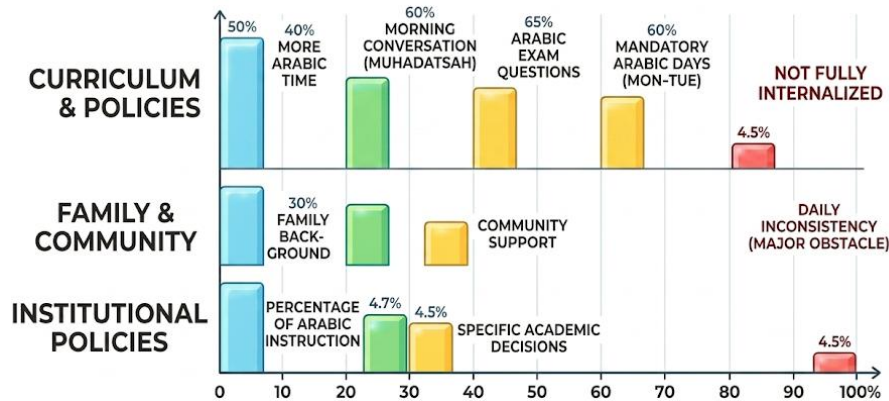


Figure 1. External Factors Affecting Student's Arabic Literacy

External factors originate from the *pondok pesantren* environment, family, community, and institutional policies that shape the quality of students' basic Arabic literacy. Curriculum and Arabic Language Policy. The curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf allocated more instructional time to Arabic than to other subjects. *Muhadatsah* (conversation) activities were conducted every morning, and examination questions across several subjects were presented in Arabic rather than Arabic Malay. However, daily Arabic communication is strictly enforced only on Mondays and Tuesdays. This inconsistency in the language environment, as acknowledged by the Arabic language teacher, emerged as a major obstacle because Arabic was not fully internalized in the students' everyday communication.

Arabic-speaking ecosystem (*Bi'ah Arabiyah*) Environment in the *pondok pesantren*. The Arabic language teacher explicitly stated that neither the environment of Teluk Rendah Pasar Village nor the atmosphere within the *pondok pesantren* was sufficiently supportive of establishing an ideal *bi'ah arabiyah*. The use of Arabic was still perceived as unfamiliar by the surrounding community outside the *pondok pesantren*. This finding is consistent with Azra (1999), who argued that external factors, such as the *pondok pesantren* environment, interact directly with students' internal factors in shaping literacy development.

Parental and Family Support. Parental support for Arabic language learning was generally positive, with parents actively monitoring their children's progress during visits to the *pondok pesantren* and through regular telephone communication. The teacher confirmed that parents were generally supportive and pleased that their children were learning Arabic. This finding is consistent with Alramamneh et al. (2023), who reported that parents' positive attitudes toward reading are a significant predictor of children's literacy outcomes.

Availability of Educational Facilities and Infrastructure. The availability of learning resources, such as dictionaries and instructional aids, was considered sufficiently supportive of literacy development. Financial constraints, however, posed a practical challenge to procuring additional learning materials. The absence of a language laboratory and limited access to Arabic-language digital media hindered the development of more comprehensive literacy

skills. This finding is consistent with Azzam and Hanafi (2025), who reported that schools equipped with well-developed language laboratories provide richer learning opportunities.

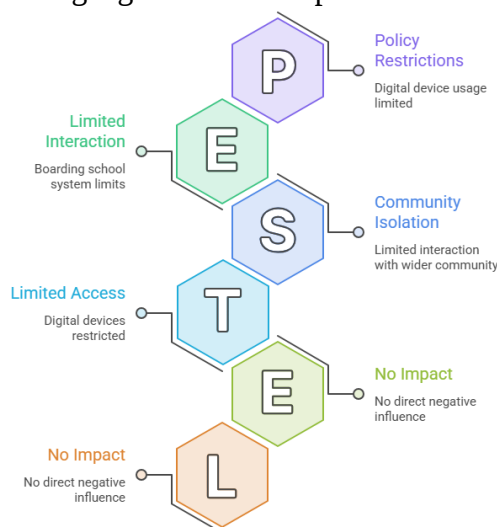


Figure 2. Pondok Pesantren: Technology & Social Environment

Influence of Technology and the External Social Environment. The influence of information technology, mobile devices, and the internet on students' Arabic literacy was relatively limited due to the *pondok pesantren*'s policy restricting the use of digital devices to visitation periods and holidays. The social environment of Teluk Rendah Pasar Village also did not exert a direct negative influence, as the boarding school system limited students' interactions with the wider community.

Institutional Collaboration. Formal collaboration with external institutions, such as language organizations, universities, or other *pondok pesantren*, had not yet been formally established. The *mudir* explained that the *pondok pesantren* had previously invited teachers from other *pondok pesantren* to provide advanced instruction; however, the program could not be sustained due to several technical constraints.

The findings demonstrate that students' achievement in basic Arabic literacy is shaped by the simultaneous interaction of internal student factors and the external ecosystem of the *pondok pesantren*, forming a reinforcing cycle that continuously strengthens literacy development. This pattern is consistent with the theory proposed by Azra (1999), which suggests that students' cognitive abilities and the conditions of the *pondok pesantren* environment interact to determine success in reading Islamic religious texts.

On the internal dimension, students' strong intrinsic motivation to understand sacred texts fostered independent study habits. When confronted with the complexity of Arabic morphology, which is characterized by extensive *i'rab* (grammatical inflection) and *wazan* (morphological patterns), students encountered cognitive and linguistic challenges. Difficulties in reading *kitab gundul* were closely associated with students' oral morphological awareness, which Saiegh-Haddad and Schiff (2024) identified as the strongest cognitive predictor of reading comprehension in Standard Arabic.

On the external dimension, the progressive curriculum, implemented through morning *muhadatsah* activities, was unable to compensate for the weak daily *bi'ah arabiyah* due to the inconsistent enforcement of Arabic language rules, which were applied only two days per week. This situation was further compounded by the rural setting of Teluk Rendah Pasar Village, which provided little exposure to Arabic outside formal learning hours. As a result, Arabic literacy was often perceived as a temporary academic requirement rather than a life skill. This limited external ecosystem reduced students' intrinsic motivation when teachers employed monotonous instructional methods. In contrast, students' motivation increased when

teachers adopted varied student-centered approaches, such as word-card games and meaning-guessing activities. This finding reinforces the premise proposed by Kaltsum et al. (2025) and KhatibAbbas and Lipka (2025) that teachers' instructional responses constitute the most critical external stimulus for both diagnosing and addressing barriers to basic literacy. The absence of a language laboratory and Arabic-language digital media at the *pondok pesantren* (Azzam & Hanafi, 2025) further widened the literacy achievement gap among students from general Elementary School backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that basic Arabic literacy at Pondok Pesantren Bustanil Inshaf in Teluk Rendah Pasar Village is influenced by two groups of factors that interact dynamically. From the internal dimension, intrinsic motivation and interest in learning emerged as the most dominant factors. Students with strong intrinsic motivation, characterized by a desire to understand the Qur'an independently and to read *kitab kuning* without *harakat*, demonstrated greater learning autonomy and stronger consistency than those who studied solely out of obligation. Educational background, particularly differences between graduates of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* and general Elementary Schools, consistent independent study habits, various specific difficulties in learning Arabic, including memorizing *mufrodat*, reading *kitab gundul*, applying *harakat*, and *istima'*, as well as physical condition and teacher competence, also played significant roles.

From the external dimension, the curriculum provides a progressive institutional foundation through substantial instructional time for Arabic and daily morning *muhadatsah*. The requirement to use Arabic, however, is enforced only on Mondays and Tuesdays, limiting its integration into students' daily communication. The weak *bi'ah arabiyah* emerged as the most critical finding of this study. Positive parental support, adequate learning facilities, and minimal digital distractions supported literacy development, whereas limited institutional collaboration remained a weakness requiring immediate attention.

The interaction between internal and external factors creates a reinforcing cycle: high motivation responds positively to a conducive learning environment, while a supportive environment fosters and sustains motivation even among initially unmotivated students. Effective interventions should adopt a holistic approach that addresses both internal and external dimensions by expanding mandatory Arabic-language use, implementing differentiated learning strategies, improving educational facilities, and cultivating institutional collaboration.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Grammarly to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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