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The Phenomenon of Basic Educational Backgrounds in Strengthening Reading Skills (Maharah Qiraah) within Arabic Language Instruction at MTs Darussalam Bogor

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ABSTRACT

Arabic language learning in madrasahs demands adequate initial readiness from students, particularly in Arabic text reading skills. This study aims to analyze the contribution of elementary educational backgrounds to the mastery of maharah al-qira'ah (reading skills) in Arabic language instruction among seventh-grade students at MTs Darussalam Kota Bogor. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews and observations. The findings indicate that elementary educational backgrounds contribute to Arabic text reading abilities, primarily by shaping students' initial readiness to recognize hijaiyah letters, read, and understand basic linguistic structures. Students originating from Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, SDIT (Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools), and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) tend to demonstrate superior initial abilities compared to those from general elementary schools. However, this contribution is not absolute, as it is influenced by other factors such as non-formal learning experiences and reading habits. Furthermore, adaptive teaching strategies encompassing differentiated instruction, direct reading practice, and supplementary programs such as tahsin (remedial reading) proved effective in addressing variations in student abilities. Consequently, the mastery of *maharah al-qira'ah* is the result of an interaction between elementary educational backgrounds and the instructional strategies implemented by teachers.

Keywords: *educational background; qira'ah; Arabic learning; teacher strategies; madrasah*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language instruction in madrasahs plays a crucial role as a medium for understanding the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic literature. Under the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 183 of 2019, Arabic language

learning is directed toward developing students' language competencies, including reading skills (*maharah qira'ah*), as part of strengthening religious literacy in madrasahs (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

However, the implementation of Arabic language instruction continues to face challenges regarding disparities in students' initial abilities. Some students have acquired prior Arabic learning experience since elementary education, whereas others are exposed to *hijaiyah* (Arabic) letters for the first time upon entering madrasah. These differing experiences lead to variations in Arabic text reading abilities, thereby influencing classroom learning dynamics (Mahfud, 2023). In this context, *maharah qira'ah* becomes a foundational skill, serving as the basis for mastering vocabulary, sentence structure, and Arabic text comprehension (Sahri, 2025).

This phenomenon is also observed at MTs Darussalam Kota Bogor. Seventh-grade students come from diverse educational backgrounds, such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), General Elementary Schools (SD), and Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT), while also possessing non-formal learning experiences through TPA (Quranic Education Centers), Madrasah Diniyah (non-formal Islamic afternoon schools), or pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). Based on initial interviews with the Arabic language teacher, students' reading abilities demonstrate significant variation. A portion of the students can read Arabic texts fluently, whereas others still struggle to recognize hijaiyah letters and read simple words or sentences. This condition presents a challenge for teachers in designing instructional strategies tailored to students' entry-level capabilities.

Several previous studies indicate that elementary educational background influences Arabic learning readiness. Sahri (2025) found that MI graduates possess better reading readiness than SD graduates, while Mahfud (2023) demonstrated that MI graduates exhibit higher interest in learning Arabic. Research by Iskandar (2025) examined teachers' strategies in addressing reading difficulties, whereas Mardhiyah (2025) highlighted the factors contributing to low Arabic text reading proficiency (Mardhiyah, 2025). Nevertheless, qualitative research investigating how elementary educational backgrounds contribute to *maharah qira'ah* and how teachers respond to these diverse abilities within classroom instruction remains relatively limited.

Based on these circumstances, this study aims to analyze the contribution of elementary educational backgrounds to *maharah qira'ah* in Arabic language learning among seventh-grade students at MTs Darussalam Kota Bogor. Furthermore, this research examines students' learning experiences across various formal and non-formal educational backgrounds, as well as teacher strategies for managing diverse reading abilities in the classroom. The findings of this study are expected to provide a more comprehensive overview of the relationship between elementary educational background and the mastery of *maharah qira'ah* in madrasah Arabic language instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deep understanding of the contribution of elementary educational background to *maharah qira'ah* (reading skills) in Arabic language instruction. The research was conducted at MTs



Darussalam Kota Bogor, focusing on seventh-grade students from diverse educational backgrounds. This approach was selected for its capability to contextually describe students' learning experiences and teachers' strategies in addressing variations in reading proficiency. According to John W. Creswell (2018), qualitative research aims to understand the meaning of a phenomenon based on the participants' perspectives within a natural setting (Rosyada, 2020).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the Arabic language teacher and seventh-grade students representing various elementary educational backgrounds, including general elementary schools (SD), Islamic elementary schools (MI), integrated Islamic elementary schools (SDIT), Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and non-formal educational experiences such as Quranic education centers (TPA) and non-formal Islamic afternoon schools (Madrasah Diniyah). Classroom observations were utilized to examine the *maharah qira'ah* (reading skills) instructional process, while documentation complemented the data through instructional materials and supporting documents. The use of these multiple data collection techniques aimed to obtain comprehensive data through source and method triangulation (Creswell, 2016).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, which encompasses data condensation, data display, and drawing as well as verifying conclusions. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed iteratively to identify patterns regarding the contribution of elementary educational background to *maharah qira'ah* (reading skills) and teacher strategies in Arabic language instruction (Miles, 2014). Data trustworthiness was enhanced through source and technique triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Contribution of Elementary Educational Background to Students' Mastery of Maharah qira'ah

Based on school administrative records for seventh-grade students at MTs Darussalam Kota Bogor for the 2025/2026 academic year (MTs Darussalam Kota Bogor, 2025), students came from diverse elementary education backgrounds, including public elementary schools (SD), Islamic elementary schools (MI), and Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT). These differences in educational background may influence students' initial readiness for learning Arabic, particularly in *maharah qira'ah* (Arabic reading skills). Table 1 presents the distribution of students according to their elementary educational backgrounds.

Table 1 Data Recapitulation of Grade VII Students

No	Category	Students Size
1	Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN)	157
2	Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI)	30
3	Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu (SDIT)	5
4	PKBM (Sekolah Paket A)	1
5	Pondok Pesantren	1
Total		194

Source: Student administrative data of MTs Darussalam Kota Bogor, 2025

Interview results indicate that seventh-grade students' mastery of *maharah qira'ah* (reading skills) is influenced by the variety of learning experiences acquired prior to entering MTs (Islamic Junior High School). This is evident in a statement by U.N.J., who expressed that "From MI, I was already accustomed to reading, so now it is easier" (Interview, February 24, 2026). Conversely, E.D. revealed that "There was no prior Arabic learning experience" (Interview, February 24, 2026), while Z.N.W. stated "It is very difficult, because it differs from Latin script and I am not yet fluent in joining letters into sentences" (Interview, February 25, 2026). These differing experiences demonstrate that Arabic reading ability does not emerge instantaneously upon entering MTs; rather, it is an accumulation of learning experiences gained during previous formal education or through non-formal educational institutions.

These findings align with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which asserts that learning is the process whereby knowledge and skills are transformed from experience (Zamroni, 2023). Learning experiences acquired through Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, SDIT (Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools), pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), TPA (Quranic Education Centers), or Madrasah Diniyah (non-formal Islamic afternoon schools) serve as concrete experiences shaping students' initial readiness to engage in *maharah qira'ah* instruction. Consequently, students who have been accustomed to recognizing *hijaiyah* (Arabic) letters, mastering mufradat (vocabulary), and practicing Arabic reading from an early age tend to adapt more easily when learning Arabic at the MTs level compared to students who are newly exposed to the language (Muttaqien, 2020).

Furthermore, the results of this study support Rumelhart's Schema Theory, which explains that reading comprehension is influenced by pre-existing cognitive structures (schemata) held by the reader (Juliani, 2025). These schemata encompass mastery of *hijaiyah* letters, phonetics (*ashwat*), vocabulary (*mufradat*), and grammatical structures (*qawa'id*) (Agung Muttaqien M. A., 2023). Students with broader learning experiences are able to activate these schemata when reading Arabic texts, thereby facilitating a smoother reading process. Conversely, students lacking adequate prior learning experiences often encounter difficulties with letter pronunciation, diacritical marks (*harakat*), and sentence construction due to their limited linguistic schemata.



On the other hand, interview findings with Arabic language teachers reveal that school origin is not the sole determinant of students' reading abilities. A teacher noted that "It is not guaranteed, because reading skills are mostly obtained from TPA or Madrasah Diniyah" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This statement indicates that the intensity of practice and reading habituation play a more substantial role than the formal status of the institution alone. This finding reinforces Vygotsky's social constructivism perspective, which explains that learning is influenced by learning experiences and interactions occurring across various educational environments (Aprianti, 2025). Thus, the contribution of elementary educational background to *maharah qira'ah* must be comprehensively understood as an integration of formal learning experiences, non-formal education, and sustained reading habituation.

Teachers' Strategies in Managing Differences in Educational Backgrounds Toward Maharah qira'ah

The results of the study indicate that teachers play a crucial role in managing differences in students' educational backgrounds during *maharah qira'ah* (reading skills) instruction. A teacher stated that "Students' abilities are indeed varied; some are already fluent, while others are still at a very basic level, so they cannot be treated equally" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This finding demonstrates that teachers understand the heterogeneity of students' abilities as a foundation for instructional design. This aligns with learning concepts asserting that instruction is an interactive process between educators and learners aimed at achieving learning objectives (Agung Muttaqien M. A., 2023). In this context, the teacher acts as a facilitator who adapts the learning process to the characteristics and initial abilities of each learner, thereby optimizing the attainment of learning objectives (Aprianti, 2025).

Teachers also implement instructional strategies focused on enhancing reading fluency prior to addressing aspects of *tajwid* (recitation rules) and *i'rab* (grammatical inflections). A teacher explained that "The strategy used for teaching Arabic reading here focuses on text reading fluency first, before paying attention to *tajwid* rules and *i'rab*" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This finding is consistent with the concept of *maharah qira'ah*, which holds that reading skills begin with the ability to recognize linguistic symbols and pronounce sounds accurately before advancing toward reading comprehension. Therefore, placing emphasis on reading fluency represents a developmental stage that supports the attainment of Arabic language learning objectives, particularly in cultivating students' reading skills (Juliani, 2025).

In addressing disparities in student abilities, teachers provide differentiated instruction tailored to individual needs. This is evident in the teacher's statements: "I provide different treatment and approaches for students, and the tests are also different," and "I have identified those who cannot yet read Arabic texts, and I frequently ask them to read aloud" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This finding is aligned with Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that each learner possesses distinct learning experiences, thereby requiring an instructional process adapted to their prior experiences and initial abilities (Zamroni, 2023). Thus, the pedagogical adjustments made by teachers reflect the implementation of instruction that considers students' prior learning experiences.

Instructional methods conducted through direct and repeated reading exercises also support the mastery of *maharah qira'ah*. A teacher conveyed that "The teacher asks students to read texts directly so that they become familiar with Arabic sentence structures" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This habituation accords with Schema Theory, which explains that repeated reading experiences strengthen a learner's existing cognitive schemata. The more frequently students practice reading Arabic texts, the more easily they recognize letters, vocabulary, and sentence structures, allowing reading ability to develop incrementally (Juliani, 2025).

Beyond classroom instruction, teachers also organize a *tahsin* (remedial reading) program for students who are not yet fluent in reading. A teacher explained that "For children who cannot yet read fluently, there is an agreement with parents to hold tahsin sessions after school hours" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This program shows that reading improvement is not confined to formal classroom instruction but is also reinforced through supplementary learning experiences outside regular school hours. This finding harmonizes with Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that continuous learning experiences assist learners in developing their capabilities more optimally (Zamroni, 2023).

Furthermore, teachers pay attention to students' affective dimensions within the learning process. A teacher stated that "There are indeed students who lack self-confidence, but firm guidance is necessary; we should not yield when they refuse to participate" (Interview, February 24, 2026). This finding indicates that *maharah qira'ah* instruction is oriented not only toward reading mastery but also toward fostering courage and student readiness to engage in the learning process. This aligns with the essence of instruction that positions the teacher as a mentor creating a learning environment that encourages students to be active and confident in reaching Arabic language learning goals (Aprianti, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study has described the layered, synergistic dynamics of scaffolding that occurred during collaborative writing activities in a language classroom. The key findings confirm that scaffolding in this context did not occur through a single mode, but as a complementary system of support combining teacher-designed macro-scaffolding with micro-scaffolding that emerged organically in interaction among students.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of Vygotsky's ZPD in understanding writing as a socially mediated, dialogic activity. Effective scaffolding is not merely "assistance" but functions as a "bridge" that enables students to move from a zone of inability toward a zone of increasingly independent competence. This transition occurs through gradual internalization facilitated by meaningful social interaction, both with the teacher and among peers.

From a practical standpoint, this study offers several recommendations for language teachers. First, teachers should design macro-scaffolding explicitly and systematically before collaborative writing sessions, including providing graphic organizers, genre model texts, and clear writing checklists; robust macro-scaffolding provides the foundation for productive micro-scaffolding among students. Second, teachers should design a planned scaffolding-fading strategy gradually reducing the intensity of support as students' competence increases, so that students can progressively become independent writers. Third, teachers should teach



students how to give one another effective feedback (peer scaffolding training) so that interaction among students becomes more productive and does not lapse into “pseudo-scaffolding.” Fourth, group composition should be designed carefully, taking ability heterogeneity into account to foster richer interaction within the collective ZPD.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Its specific context a single class, a single text type, a single institution limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to explore the dynamics of scaffolding across different text genres, educational levels, and language contexts. In addition, longitudinal studies that track students’ writing development over an extended period would offer a more comprehensive picture of the cumulative impact of collaborative scaffolding on writing autonomy.

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