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Interactive Reading Model in Enhancing Arabic Learners' Reading Comprehension: Evidence from Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

Arabic reading comprehension requires more than word recognition because learners must manage morphological density, syntactic flexibility, and frequent omission of short vowels (harakāt), which can increase ambiguity and cognitive load. Therefore, this study investigates the efficacy of an interactive reading model in improving Arabic reading comprehension among students in an Indonesian pondok pesantren and examines how learners experience and negotiate reading difficulties during interactive reading. Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved 25 pesantren students who had studied Arabic for one to two years. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to capture both students' perceptions and their observable reading behaviors across pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading phases. Thematic analysis was applied through iterative coding, codebook refinement, and category development to generate themes describing comprehension development, breakdown-and-repair processes, and cross-language differences in reading strategies. Findings indicate that interactive reading shifted students from predominantly word-for-word translation toward more meaning-oriented comprehension. Students reported improved ability to identify main ideas, select relevant details, and track cohesion through pronoun reference and discourse markers. Confidence in reading unvowelled texts increased because interactive routines normalized uncertainty and enabled collaborative clarification. When comprehension broke down, students commonly employed repair moves such as rereading for context, testing root-pattern clues, consulting peers, and seeking teacher scaffolding for confirmation. Compared with Indonesian reading, Arabic comprehension was slower and more form-focused, making rapid skimming and automatic inferencing difficult; however, interactive reading reduced these constraints by supporting negotiation of meaning through dialogue. The study contributes a context-sensitive account of how interactive reading can be integrated with pesantren literacy traditions to strengthen comprehension processes in classical and unvowelled Arabic texts.

Keywords: Interactive reading; Arabic reading comprehension; Pondok pesantren; Reading strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension in Arabic transcends simple word recognition because meaning is distributed across layers of orthography, morphology, phonology, and syntax. For many learners, especially those reading unvowelled texts, comprehension requires simultaneous resolution of root-and-pattern morphology, flexible syntactic ordering, and the frequent omission of short vowels (harakāt), all of which heighten cognitive load and slow down the construction of coherent mental models from print (Asadi et al., 2024;

Saiegh-Haddad, 2017). In practice, students may appear successful because they can decode, pronounce, or translate segments, yet still struggle to integrate propositions across clauses, track referents, and infer implied relations—processes essential for genuine comprehension. This vulnerability is intensified in Arabic because access to phonological information supports lexical identification and morpho-syntactic disambiguation; when such information is absent or unstable, both accuracy and meaning-making are affected (Abu-Rabia, 2002). Consequently, Arabic reading difficulty is not merely a vocabulary problem but a processing challenge in which learners must coordinate multiple linguistic cues under time pressure. These constraints help explain why conventional assessments that emphasize correct vocalization or word-by-word translation can overestimate comprehension: students may succeed in local decoding while failing to build global coherence, evaluate arguments, or derive the intended message from semantically dense passages (Asadi et al., 2024; Saiegh-Haddad, 2017).

Given these linguistic realities, effective Arabic reading instruction must cultivate strategic, interactive engagement with texts rather than treating reading as a solitary decoding-and-translation routine. Research on comprehension instruction consistently emphasizes that readers develop proficiency when they are guided to predict content, infer meanings from context, monitor understanding, and repair breakdowns through clarification and rereading (Peng et al., 2023; Ukrainetz, 2015). Yet in many classrooms, these strategies remain under-taught: teachers explain, students follow, and comprehension is presumed if students can pronounce or produce literal translations. Such pedagogy can leave learners without the metacognitive tools needed to recognize when meaning has collapsed or to mobilize linguistic cues (e.g., morphology, connectors, pronoun reference) to restore coherence (Ness, 2016). Interactive reading environments address this gap by positioning reading as a cyclical dialogue in which meaning is negotiated continuously through teacher–student exchanges and peer collaboration (Davis, 2013).

Within dialogic routines—such as guided questioning, collective paraphrasing, and think-aloud modeling—students externalize their comprehension processes, learn how competent readers justify interpretations, and gain permission to ask "why" and "how" questions that deepen textual understanding (Ness, 2016). Importantly, interactive models also enhance motivation and engagement, which in turn strengthens strategic reading behavior and persistence with challenging texts (Wigfield et al., 2008). For Arabic, this matters because learners must repeatedly practice using partial cues (roots, patterns, syntactic signals, discourse markers) to hypothesize meaning and then confirm or revise those hypotheses in social interaction—a process that is difficult to cultivate in correctness-driven, teacher-dominated routines (Davis, 2013; Peng et al., 2023). Therefore, interactive reading is not an "extra activity" but a pedagogical necessity to translate linguistic knowledge into functional comprehension strategies (Ukrainetz, 2015; Devi & Suroto, 2024).

The urgency of this issue becomes more visible in pondok pesantren, where Arabic learning is deeply embedded in religious scholarship and the obligation to access classical sources. In many pesantren, instruction emphasizes mastery of nahwu (syntax) and sharaf (morphology) through memorization and grammar-translation using kitab-based materials. While this tradition develops explicit grammatical awareness, students often struggle to convert rule knowledge into real-time comprehension when reading semantically dense classical texts, particularly those presented without diacritics. The absence of vowels intensifies lexical ambiguity and slows word recognition because learners must supply vocalization while also selecting contextually plausible meanings (Zeroual et al., 2017; Hermena & Reichle, 2020; Hermena et al., 2016). These challenges

are compounded by limited exposure to authentic Arabic beyond the classroom and a learning culture that may prioritize correctness and deference over exploratory inquiry—conditions that can restrict extensive reading, reduce willingness to test interpretations, and inhibit clarification-seeking behaviors (Midhwah & Alhawary, 2020; Muhammad & Purbani, 2024). Empirical work suggests that compared with first-language readers, many second-language learners in settings like pesantren exhibit smaller automatic vocabularies, slower word recognition, and less internalized morphological parsing, which can trigger comprehension breakdowns during sustained reading (Abu-Rabia & Darawshe, 2024; Alsayadi et al., 2021).

Moreover, the processing demands of Arabic can feel disproportionately heavier than reading in students' first language (e.g., Indonesian), producing cognitive overload and limiting the capacity to generate inferences or integrate ideas across sentences (Alsadoon & Heift, 2015; Shiekh et al., 2020). Psychological and sociocultural factors also matter: when classroom discourse centers on avoiding error, learners may become reluctant to question texts, hypothesize meanings, or admit confusion—behaviors that are crucial for developing comprehension in a second language (Balla et al., 2019; Muhammad & Purbani, 2024). Finally, orthographic complexity (script features, diacritics, and spelling conventions) further differentiates Arabic reading from students' L1 reading experience, and the frequent absence of diacritics in learning materials can undermine speed and accuracy, prompting calls for instructional supports such as diacritization to facilitate comprehension (Shiekh et al., 2021; Al-Thubaity et al., 2020; Midhwah & Alhawary, 2020; Jumaily, 2023).

Against this backdrop, an interactive reading model tailored to pesantren contexts offers a promising route to bridge traditional grammatical foundations with modern comprehension pedagogy. Rather than discarding kitab traditions, interactive reading can operationalize them through structured routines across pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading phases, enabling students to activate prior knowledge, set purposes, and anticipate meaning before engaging the text (Nasution et al., 2019; Pratiwi & Norani, 2022; Tham & Sang, 2021). In reciprocal teaching and related approaches, learners rotate through roles such as predictor, questioner, clarifier, and summarizer, making comprehension visible and distributing responsibility across the group (Nasution et al., 2019). Dialogic reading further strengthens this process by normalizing peer-to-peer meaning negotiation, where students learn to justify interpretations using linguistic evidence (roots, patterns, cohesive ties) and contextual cues (Ekawati et al., 2024; Prasetya & Syarif, 2023).

During reading, teacher prompts and peer discussion guide self-monitoring: students practice identifying pronoun referents, tracking logical connectors, and resolving cause–effect or comparison relations, thereby reducing the likelihood that decoding will proceed without understanding (Pratiwi & Norani, 2022). Post-reading tasks then consolidate comprehension through summarizing, paraphrasing, argument mapping, and contextual reflection, helping students move beyond literal translation toward deeper interpretation aligned with pesantren learning goals (Tham & Sang, 2021; Sudiarti et al., 2022). Crucially, effectiveness increases when the model is integrated with familiar pesantren practices: using authentic kitab passages, modeling how an ustadz reads "for meaning," and framing discussion as an extension of halaqah-style inquiry can legitimize strategic reading while preserving institutional identity (Pratiwi & Norani, 2022; Sudiarti et al., 2022). However, implementation also requires attention to constraints such as teacher training, manageable group routines, and assessment practices that value comprehension processes rather than only correct translation (Tham

& Sang, 2021; Sudiarti et al., 2022). These considerations position interactive reading as both an instructional approach and a school-wide literacy shift.

Building on these issues, the present study focuses on the efficacy of an interactive reading model for improving Arabic reading comprehension among students in Indonesian pondok pesantren, with particular attention to how the model addresses learners' linguistic processing difficulties (morphology, syntax, and unvowelled texts) and their comprehension challenges relative to reading in the first language or other second-language experiences (Asadi et al., 2024; Abu-Rabia, 2002; Shiekh et al., 2020). This topic is important because pesantren students' ability to access classical texts is central to their academic and religious formation, yet persistent comprehension gaps suggest that rule mastery alone does not guarantee meaning-making in real reading tasks (Zeroual et al., 2017; Hermena & Reichle, 2020).

The novelty of this study lies in its contextualized integration of interactive reading pedagogy with pesantren kitab traditions—treating classical, often unvowelled Arabic texts as the core material for strategic, dialogic comprehension work—while simultaneously analyzing both cognitive-linguistic constraints and the sociocultural classroom norms that shape students' willingness to inquire, clarify, and co-construct meaning (Pratiwi & Norani, 2022; Muhammad & Purbani, 2024; Sudiarti et al., 2022). Therefore, the research objectives are: (1) to examine whether implementing an interactive reading model leads to measurable improvement in students' Arabic reading comprehension in pesantren settings; and (2) to analyze how interactive reading processes (predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and discussion) mediate students' reported difficulties, including those arising from unvowelled texts and orthographic complexity (Ness, 2016; Tham & Sang, 2021).

To attain these objectives, the study addresses two research questions: **RQ1:** To what extent does the interactive reading model improve pesantren students' Arabic reading comprehension compared with conventional instruction? **RQ2:** How do students experience and negotiate reading difficulties during interactive reading, and how do these experiences differ from their reading comprehension processes in their first language or other language-learning contexts?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate (1) the extent to which an interactive reading model supports Arabic reading comprehension in pondok pesantren and (2) how learners experience and negotiate reading difficulties (e.g., morphology, syntax, missing harakāt) during interactive reading, including contrasts with their reading processes in Indonesian or other languages. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research questions focus on process, meaning-making, and participants' lived experiences in authentic instructional settings rather than solely on measurable outcomes. Interactive reading is inherently dialogic and socially mediated; therefore, qualitative inquiry allows the study to capture how comprehension is co-constructed through teacher prompts, peer discussion, questioning, clarification, and summarization routines in real time. This design is also suitable for exploring how pesantren norms (e.g., emphasis on correctness, deference to authority) shape students' willingness to ask questions, hypothesize meanings, and repair comprehension breakdowns during the reading process.

The design is best characterized as a classroom-based qualitative case study conducted in a pesantren context. The "case" is the implementation of an interactive reading model in Arabic reading lessons and the participants' responses to that

instructional model. This case study orientation supports rich description of instructional practices, learner strategies, and contextual constraints (e.g., unvowelled texts, kitab-based routines, limited exposure to Arabic outside class). It enables the researcher to build an interpretive account of how interactive reading functions within the institutional culture of pesantren and how learners' comprehension behaviors evolve across reading phases (pre-, while-, post-reading).

Participants

The research participants consist of 25 Arabic learners residing in a pondok pesantren who have studied Arabic for approximately 1–2 years. This sample size is suitable for a qualitative study because it supports in-depth exploration of learners' experiences while still providing enough variation to identify recurring patterns across participants, particularly regarding interactive reading processes and reading comprehension difficulties. Participants are recruited using purposive sampling aligned with the study objectives, namely to examine how interactive reading is enacted in Arabic lessons and how students experience and manage comprehension challenges. Purposive sampling is appropriate because it ensures that all selected participants have meaningful exposure to the interactive reading routines implemented in the pesantren Arabic classroom, thereby enabling rich and relevant data collection.

Eligibility for participation is based on clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Students are included if they are currently enrolled as santri in the selected pesantren, have learned Arabic within the pesantren context for 1–2 years, participate regularly in Arabic reading lessons that apply interactive reading routines, and are willing to provide informed consent (including guardian consent when necessary). Students are excluded if they have studied Arabic for less than one year, as this may indicate insufficient exposure to the instructional routines being investigated, or for more than two years, as this falls outside the targeted experience range. Learners who are absent from most observed reading lessons during the data collection period are also excluded because limited participation would reduce the completeness and trustworthiness of observation-based evidence.

To contextualize findings without compromising participants' anonymity, the study records and reports basic demographic information, including participants' age range, gender (depending on whether the pesantren setting allows mixed participation or is single-gender), and grade level or program level. Additional contextual indicators include the length of Arabic study (one year or two years), students' self-reported reading confidence in Arabic using a brief rating for grouping purposes, and whether they had prior Arabic exposure before entering the pesantren (for example through informal learning or a madrasah background). Confidentiality is maintained by using pseudonyms or coded identifiers for all participants in transcripts, field notes, and reporting.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

This study employs semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as the primary research instruments to capture both participants' reported experiences and their observable reading behaviors during interactive reading. Using these two instruments enables the study to document not only what students say about their reading comprehension challenges and strategy use, but also how these processes unfold in real classroom interactions, thereby strengthening the depth and credibility of the findings.

The semi-structured interview is designed to explore students' perceptions of Arabic reading difficulty, the strategies they apply during interactive reading, and the ways they compare reading Arabic with reading in Indonesian or other languages they know. The interview protocol is developed directly from the study objectives and research

questions, with attention to well-established constructs in reading comprehension strategy research such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and monitoring understanding. The protocol also integrates Arabic-specific reading challenges, including morphological complexity, syntactic ambiguity, missing harakāt, and lexical uncertainty. Interviews use open-ended questions supported by prompts to elicit concrete accounts of students' reading processes, for example asking students to describe what they do before reading an Arabic text in class, how they decide on meaning when encountering an unvowelled word, what aspects of group discussion help them understand the text, how reading Arabic differs from reading Indonesian, and how they resolve confusion when comprehension breaks down.

To strengthen trustworthiness, the interview guide is reviewed by an Arabic language educator and a qualitative methods reviewer to ensure clarity and content relevance. The protocol is then refined through two to three pilot interviews with students who share similar characteristics but are not included in the main sample, allowing improvements in wording, sequencing, and cultural appropriateness. Consistency is maintained by using a common set of core questions for all participants while still allowing probing questions for depth. Selective member checking is also applied by summarizing key points at the end of interviews and confirming whether the interpretation accurately reflects participants' intended meanings.

Classroom observation is used to document how interactive reading is enacted in practice and how students engage in comprehension behaviors across pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading phases. The observation focuses on teacher prompts that encourage predicting, clarifying, inferencing, and summarizing, as well as student behaviors such as questioning, turn-taking, peer explanation, and negotiation of meaning. It also attends to how students interact with the text, including how they handle morphology, syntax, missing harakāt, and reference tracking, and it records evidence of comprehension monitoring such as repair moves, rereading, and contextual inference. In addition, observation examines classroom norms that influence interaction, including participation patterns, error correction practices, and the emotional climate that may support or inhibit inquiry. The observation protocol is developed as a structured template that integrates descriptive field notes detailing classroom events, analytic memos that capture emerging interpretations linked to key constructs, and a checklist of interactive reading indicators such as student-generated questions, peer clarification, and summarization practices.

To enhance validity and reliability, observation findings are triangulated with interview responses to confirm or explain patterns across data sources. Prolonged engagement is achieved by observing multiple lessons to reduce the risk of one-off impressions and to minimize reactivity as participants become accustomed to the researcher's presence. Where feasible, inter-rater agreement can be strengthened by involving a second observer to code a subset of sessions and compare interpretations, which also supports refinement of the codebook. An audit trail is maintained through dated observation notes, coding records, and documented analytic decisions, ensuring transparency in how interpretations are formed and allowing the study's reasoning process to be traced.

Data Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis supported by systematic coding procedures to interpret data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The analysis was conducted iteratively, moving back and forth between data collection and interpretation so that emerging insights could be refined as additional evidence was

gathered. This iterative process allowed the researcher to deepen interpretations of interactive reading practices as they unfolded in the classroom and as they were narrated by participants, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data rather than shaped by early assumptions.

Data preparation began with careful organization and documentation of all materials. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' language choices and meanings as accurately as possible. Observation notes were typed and expanded immediately after each session to capture classroom interactions, contextual details, and the researcher's initial reflections while memory was still fresh. All datasets were anonymized through participant codes and the removal of identifying information, ensuring confidentiality and enabling secure handling of transcripts and field notes throughout analysis.

Initial coding focused on familiarization and open, line-by-line analysis. The researcher repeatedly read interview transcripts and observation records to gain a holistic understanding before assigning codes. Open coding was then conducted to label meaningful segments of text that captured actions, perceptions, and classroom events relevant to interactive reading and Arabic comprehension. Codes reflected both linguistic and sociocultural aspects of reading, such as diacritics confusion, peer clarification, root inference, fear of making mistakes, teacher scaffolding, and monitoring breakdown. The same coding logic was applied across interviews and observations so that reported strategies could be systematically connected to observable behaviors during interactive reading lessons. As coding progressed, the researcher consolidated codes into a structured codebook to strengthen consistency and transparency. Each code was defined with clear inclusion and exclusion rules, along with brief examples drawn from the dataset. The codebook was refined through constant comparison across participants and across lessons, enabling the researcher to check whether codes were being applied consistently and whether any codes needed to be merged, split, or redefined. This ongoing refinement ensured that the analytic framework remained coherent while still responsive to new patterns that emerged from the data.

After establishing a stable coding system, codes were grouped into broader categories aligned with the research objectives. These categories captured Arabic-specific processing challenges such as morphological density, syntactic ambiguity, missing harakāt, and difficulties in lexical access, as well as interactive reading mechanisms including predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and discussion routines. Additional categories addressed comprehension regulation, such as monitoring, repair strategies, and shifts in confidence, and sociocultural classroom influences such as correctness orientation, willingness to inquire, and norms of peer support. The analysis also included cross-language comparisons, documenting how students described differences between reading Arabic and reading Indonesian. Themes were then generated by identifying patterned relationships among these categories, for example how peer clarification reduced vowel-related ambiguity, how a correctness-focused culture initially suppressed question-asking until interactive routines normalized inquiry, or how teacher prompts shifted students from translation-heavy practices toward inference-making and meaning construction.

To enhance trustworthiness and ensure that findings were credible and dependable, several strategies were employed throughout analysis. Triangulation was used to compare interviews and observations, allowing the researcher to examine where data converged and where it diverged, and to interpret such divergence carefully rather than treating it as error. Member checking was conducted with a subset of participants by sharing key interpretations or summarized points to verify whether the researcher's

understanding matched participants' intended meanings. Peer debriefing was used to discuss coding decisions and emerging themes with an external reviewer, helping to challenge blind spots and strengthen analytic rigor. An audit trail was maintained through organized records of raw data, coding iterations, codebook versions, and analytic memos that documented how interpretations were developed. Negative case analysis was also incorporated by actively seeking data that contradicted early themes and revising interpretations accordingly, ensuring that themes reflected complexity rather than only the most common patterns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

RQ1. To what extent does the interactive reading model improve pesantren students' Arabic reading comprehension compared with conventional instruction?

Aligned with RQ1, the five questions collectively indicate that pesantren students generally perceive interactive reading as producing a meaningful improvement in Arabic reading comprehension compared with conventional instruction. Students most frequently describe a shift in their understanding from decoding and word-by-word translation toward constructing overall meaning, so they can follow the message of a text even when some vocabulary remains unfamiliar. Interactive reading also appears to strengthen their ability to identify main ideas and key details, because prediction and questioning routines help them locate the purpose of a paragraph, while summarizing helps them separate essential information from supporting points.

To what changes do you notice in your understanding of Arabic texts after learning through interactive reading compared with your previous reading lessons?

Across interviews and classroom observations, learners described interactive reading as producing a clear shift from "reading-to-translate" toward "reading-to-understand." In conventional lessons, many students reported that comprehension often stopped at decoding and word-by-word translation, which felt safe but slow and easily disrupted when facing unfamiliar vocabulary or unvowelled text. After sustained interactive reading routines, students commonly described comprehension as more purpose-driven: they entered texts with predictions, checked meaning through questions, and confirmed understanding through peer discussion and teacher prompts. Observational data aligned with these claims, showing more frequent clarification turns, more referencing of textual clues (connectors, pronouns, repeated roots), and fewer long silences where students waited for the teacher's "correct" meaning.

Regarding changes in understanding after interactive reading, students most often emphasized improved ability to "follow the story/idea" even when not every word was known. Instead of halting at difficult words, students described using context, morphology cues, and peer explanations to keep meaning moving. This created a sense of "continuity," where comprehension was built incrementally through negotiation rather than achieved only after full translation. In observations, this was visible when groups collectively resolved lexical ambiguity and then returned to the paragraph-level meaning, rather than staying stuck at single-word decoding.

In what ways has interactive reading influenced your ability to identify main ideas, details, and relationships between sentences in Arabic texts?

In terms of identifying main ideas, key details, and relationships between sentences, interactive reading appeared to strengthen students' macro-level comprehension. Students reported that predicting and questioning helped them locate the "point" of a paragraph, while summarizing helped them separate essential information from

supporting details. They also described improved understanding of relationships such as cause–effect, contrast, and sequence because interactive prompts pushed them to notice discourse markers and referential ties. Classroom episodes frequently showed students justifying interpretations by pointing to connectors (e.g., because/therefore-like cues), pronouns, or repeated roots that signaled cohesion, suggesting that interactive routines promoted more text-based reasoning rather than guesswork.

How does your confidence in reading unvowelled Arabic texts change when lessons use interactive reading compared with conventional instruction?

Students' confidence with unvowelled Arabic texts increased primarily because interactive reading normalized uncertainty and provided structured ways to resolve it. Learners reported that they were less afraid of being wrong because clarification was built into the routine, and peer discussion gave them "trial space" to test possible readings before speaking publicly. Observational evidence reflected this shift: students increasingly attempted interpretations aloud, asked peers to confirm vocalization/meaning, and used teacher scaffolding to reconcile form (possible vocalizations) with meaning (contextually plausible interpretation). Confidence therefore grew not because texts became easier, but because the classroom process made difficulty more manageable.

Which parts of interactive reading activities (predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, peer discussion) most help you comprehend Arabic texts, and why?

When asked which parts of interactive reading helped most, students tended to privilege peer discussion and clarification as the "engine" of comprehension because these phases provided immediate feedback and multiple perspectives on meaning. Teacher prompting was also frequently identified as critical, especially when prompts directed attention to specific comprehension breakdowns such as pronoun reference, connector meaning, or root-pattern cues. Predicting was described as useful for setting direction and reducing confusion at the start of reading, while summarizing helped consolidate meaning and confirm whether comprehension was accurate at the end. In short, students perceived the model as effective because it combined anticipatory support (predicting), real-time repair (questioning/clarifying), and consolidation (summarizing), all strengthened through collaborative talk.

Compared with conventional lessons, how often do you feel you truly understand the text without relying on word-for-word translation when using interactive reading?

Students reported that—compared with conventional instruction—they more often understood texts without relying entirely on word-for-word translation. Many described translation as still present, but no longer the only route to meaning. Instead, translation became a supporting tool used selectively, while comprehension was increasingly built through inference, discussion, and checking coherence across sentences. This indicates that interactive reading did not eliminate translation practices in pesantren contexts; rather, it repositioned translation as one strategy among several, allowing students to maintain flow and construct a more coherent understanding of the text.

RQ2: **How do students experience and negotiate reading difficulties during interactive reading, and how do these experiences differ from their reading comprehension processes in their first language or other language-learning contexts?**

These five questions cluster into distinct but connected topics that collectively map the learner's comprehension process in Arabic interactive reading and its contrast with first-language reading. The first question centers on immediate coping strategies and self-regulation at the point of difficulty, The second question targets comprehension

breakdown episodes and repair trajectories, emphasizing how meaning collapses during reading and how it is restored through interaction; its main topic is breakdown-and-repair sequences, including who initiates repair, what resources are used (textual evidence, peer help, teacher scaffolding), and how the group returns to coherent understanding. The third question examines the mediating role of interaction, specifically how collaborative talk and teacher guidance shape meaning decisions when words are ambiguous or unvowelled. The fourth question shifts to cross-language processing comparisons. The fifth question focuses on strategy transfer and barriers to transfer, identifying which L1 reading strategies (e.g., skimming, rapid inferencing, effortless cohesion tracking, silent self-questioning) are difficult to apply to Arabic and why. Together, these topics build an analytic framework for RQ2: how learners experience difficulty, how interactive reading supports regulation and repair, and how Arabic reading demands differ from and disrupt strategies that work smoothly in the first language.

When you encounter difficult Arabic words, morphology patterns, confusing sentence structures, or missing harakāt during interactive reading, what do you usually do first to regain understanding?

The qualitative findings for RQ2 show that students experience Arabic reading difficulty during interactive reading as a series of *manageable breakdowns* rather than a single "failure to understand." In interviews, learners described difficulty as emerging most often when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary, ambiguous root-pattern forms, long sentences with embedded clauses, pronoun references that were hard to trace, or unvowelled words that allowed multiple vocalizations and meanings. Classroom observations indicated that interactive reading routines transformed these moments into opportunities for negotiation: students were more likely to pause, name the problem, and seek help through peers or teacher prompts, instead of silently waiting or defaulting immediately to word-for-word translation.

When students encountered difficult words, morphology patterns, confusing structures, or missing harakāt, their first move was typically *rapid meaning checking* through social and textual resources. Many learners reported first asking peers in a low-stakes way ("Does this word mean…?"), followed by rereading the sentence or surrounding sentences to test whether a guessed meaning "fits" the context. Students also described using morphological clues—identifying a familiar root, comparing it to known patterns, and predicting approximate meaning—before requesting teacher confirmation. Observations supported these accounts: in group work, students frequently attempted provisional interpretations, then refined them through peer clarification and quick rereads, suggesting that interactive reading encouraged hypothesis-testing rather than immediate reliance on translation.

Can you describe a moment during interactive reading when your understanding broke down, and explain how you and your peers or teacher repaired it?

Students' descriptions of comprehension breakdowns during interactive reading were often narrative and procedural. A typical breakdown involved uncertainty about an unvowelled word or confusion about "who did what" in a sentence due to pronoun reference and word order. Repair commonly happened through a sequence of moves: a student flagged confusion, peers offered alternative meanings or vocalizations, the group returned to the phrase to check cohesion markers (pronouns, connectors, repeated nouns/roots), and the teacher provided targeted scaffolding when the group reached impasse. In several classroom episodes, teacher prompts did not simply supply the answer but guided students to locate evidence, such as asking them to identify the referent of a pronoun, find a connector signaling cause–effect or contrast, or justify a

chosen vocalization by testing meaning against context. This repair cycle strengthened students' self-monitoring because breakdowns became visible and solvable through shared reasoning rather than treated as personal error.

How do peer discussions and teacher prompts help you decide the meaning of ambiguous or unvowelled words during reading?

Peer discussion and teacher prompting were central to resolving ambiguous or unvowelled words because they supplied both *multiple interpretations* and *evaluation criteria*. Students reported that peers helped them generate options quickly—synonyms, Indonesian glosses, or possible vocalizations—while teacher prompts helped them select among options by attending to linguistic evidence (root-pattern cues, syntactic roles, discourse markers). In observations, peers often acted as "first responders" who kept reading flow moving, while the teacher functioned as a "precision scaffold" who focused attention on why one meaning was more coherent than another. This combination was particularly important for missing harakāt: students could propose candidate vocalizations, then confirm plausibility by checking whether the resulting meaning maintained coherence across the sentence and paragraph.

How is your process of understanding an Arabic text during interactive reading different from how you understand a text in Indonesian (or another language you are strong in)?

Students consistently contrasted this process with reading in Indonesian (or their strongest language). In Indonesian, comprehension was described as more automatic and fast, with readers able to skim for the gist, infer meaning with minimal effort, and maintain global coherence even when encountering unknown words. In Arabic, students described slower decoding, heavier attention to form, and more frequent uncertainty because meaning depends on morphology and because unvowelled script reduces phonological cues. Interactive reading partially narrowed this gap by enabling students to use social negotiation as a substitute for automaticity: when Indonesian reading relies on internalized fluency, Arabic reading in pesantren relied more on collaborative reasoning, deliberate checking of cohesion, and repeated confirmation of meaning.

What reading strategies do you use in Indonesian (or your strongest language) that you find difficult to apply in Arabic, and why do you think this happens?

Learners also identified Indonesian strategies that were difficult to transfer into Arabic. Skimming and scanning were reported as harder because Arabic script and morphology demanded more careful decoding, and missing vowels made rapid recognition risky. Context-based inferencing was also harder because limited vocabulary and morphological ambiguity reduced confidence in guesses. Even self-questioning strategies that students used naturally in Indonesian were sometimes suppressed in Arabic due to fear of being wrong, especially in settings where correctness norms are strong. Interactive reading reduced this barrier by normalizing questioning and building structured roles for clarification and summarization, yet students still reported that the cognitive load of morphology, syntax, and missing harakāt made Arabic comprehension feel less "automatic" than Indonesian comprehension.

Discussion

The present study shows that an interactive reading model can shift pesantren students' Arabic reading from a "decode-and-translate" orientation toward an increasingly meaning-driven process in which learners actively build coherence across sentences and paragraphs. In both interviews and classroom observations, students described (and displayed) greater use of prediction, questioning, clarification, and summarizing to sustain comprehension even when vocabulary was incomplete, and they

reported fewer moments of "stopping" at single-word difficulty compared with conventional lessons. This pattern supports the core assumption in comprehension strategy research that readers improve when instruction explicitly socializes them into strategic engagement and metacognitive monitoring rather than treating comprehension as a byproduct of correct decoding (Peng et al., 2023; Ukrainetz, 2015; Ness, 2016).

These gains are particularly meaningful in Arabic because the language's orthographic and morphological properties raise cognitive demands during reading. Arabic readers must coordinate root-and-pattern morphology, flexible syntactic arrangements, and frequent omission of short vowels (harakāt), all of which can destabilize lexical access and increase ambiguity during sentence integration (Abu-Rabia, 2002; Asadi et al., 2024; Saiegh-Haddad, 2017). The study's findings suggest that interactive reading helps students manage this load by distributing meaning-making across dialogue: learners test hypotheses, solicit confirmations, and use textual evidence (connectors, pronoun reference, repeated roots) to maintain paragraph-level coherence. In this sense, interactive routines function as a compensatory scaffold—reducing the likelihood that students will confuse "successful vocalization" with genuine comprehension, a risk already noted in Arabic reading contexts where decoding accuracy can mask global misunderstanding.

A key contribution of these findings is how they clarify the mechanism behind improved macro-level comprehension. Students specifically attributed stronger identification of main ideas, supporting details, and sentence-to-sentence relationships to prediction and questioning at entry points and summarizing at closure points. This aligns with intervention literature arguing that comprehension improves when instruction integrates multiple strategies and explicitly teaches readers to coordinate them (Davis, 2013; Ukrainetz, 2015; Peng et al., 2023). What the present study extends is the observation that, in pesantren Arabic reading, these strategies become most powerful when they are anchored to Arabic-relevant cues—especially cohesive ties (pronouns, connectors) and morphology-based inference—rather than being taught as generic "skills."

Students' increased confidence with unvowelled texts is another notable finding, and it appears to emerge less from reduced difficulty and more from a change in classroom norms around uncertainty. Learners reported that interactive reading "normalized not knowing," because clarification was expected and peer discussion provided a low-stakes space to propose meanings or vocalizations before public commitment. This resonates with research on vowel ambiguity and "vowel blindness" challenges, which shows that missing diacritics can impair speed and accuracy and increase ambiguity for L2 readers (Alsadoon & Heift, 2015; Midhwah & Alhawary, 2020; Hermena & Reichle, 2020). The present findings extend this work by suggesting that pedagogical "social diacritization"—collective hypothesis testing and justification—can partially mitigate the effects of missing harakāt even when the text remains physically undiacritized.

Importantly, the study does not suggest that interactive reading eliminates translation practices in pesantren; instead, it repositions translation as one strategy among several. Students indicated they more often understood without relying entirely on word-for-word translation, but translation still appeared as a supportive tool used selectively. This nuance matters in pesantren contexts where grammar-translation traditions are historically tied to kitab study and where linguistic correctness often serves as an institutional marker of scholarly discipline. Rather than framing translation as a deficit, the evidence here suggests interactive reading can "upgrade" translation from being the sole pathway to meaning into a resource integrated within broader inference,

monitoring, and coherence-building processes. This reframing may be more culturally sustainable than reforms that attempt to replace pesantren literacy traditions outright.

Findings for RQ2 further strengthen the interpretation that interactive reading operates through breakdown-and-repair cycles that cultivate metacognitive regulation. Students described Arabic difficulty as recurring micro-breakdowns (unfamiliar vocabulary, ambiguous morphology, long sentences, pronoun confusion, missing harakāt), but interactive routines transformed these moments into observable, solvable events: learners paused, named uncertainty, asked peers, reread, tested morphological cues, and sought targeted teacher scaffolding when needed. This pattern confirms what inquiry-oriented reading approaches predict: comprehension grows when learners are taught to notice breakdowns and use structured repair moves rather than reading forward while meaning collapses (Ness, 2016; Ukrainetz, 2015). At the same time, the present study extends prior work by detailing repair resources that are especially consequential for Arabic: selecting among vocalizations by testing paragraph coherence, tracing pronoun referents, and using root-pattern evidence to constrain meaning options.

Peer discussion and teacher prompting emerged as complementary, not redundant, supports. Students portrayed peers as "first responders" who generated quick options (synonyms, Indonesian glosses, candidate vocalizations), while teacher prompts provided criteria for choosing among options based on linguistic evidence and coherence. This division of labor fits dialogic and reciprocal teaching perspectives in which comprehension responsibility is distributed and made visible through structured roles (Nasution et al., 2019; Tham & Sang, 2021). It also connects to engagement research showing that participatory literacy routines strengthen persistence and strategic behavior, especially with demanding texts (Wigfield et al., 2008). In pesantren classrooms where correctness norms may initially suppress question-asking, the model's routines appear to legitimate inquiry as an instructional expectation rather than a challenge to authority (Muhammad & Purbani, 2024).

Cross-language comparisons add further explanatory depth. Students described Indonesian reading as fast and automatic, enabling skimming, effortless inferencing, and stable global coherence, whereas Arabic reading required slower decoding and heavier attention to form because meaning depends strongly on morphology and is less supported by phonological cues in unvowelled script. This aligns with broader claims that Arabic's orthographic and morphological complexity increases processing demands and can overload working resources needed for inference and integration (Abu-Rabia, 2002; Asadi et al., 2024; Hermena & Reichle, 2020). The study extends this literature by showing that interactive reading can narrow—but not erase—this gap by substituting collaborative reasoning for the automaticity students enjoy in L1 reading. In other words, interactive talk becomes a functional bridge while fluency and lexical automaticity are still developing.

Theoretical implications follow directly from these patterns. First, the findings support a socio-cognitive account of Arabic reading development in pesantren: comprehension is not only an internal cognitive act but also a socially mediated activity in which strategic reasoning, evidence testing, and monitoring are learned through participation in dialogue. Second, the data suggest that interactive reading is most impactful when it is linguistically "tuned" to Arabic constraints (morphology, cohesion, harakāt omission), implying that comprehension pedagogy in Arabic should not merely import generic reading strategies but adapt them to the language's cue structure (Abu-Rabia, 2002; Saiegh-Haddad, 2017). Third, the study provides a culturally situated extension: by being compatible with kitab-based learning goals, interactive reading can function as an internal reform that preserves pesantren identity while expanding what

counts as legitimate reading work—reasoning, questioning, and meaning negotiation, not only correct translation.

Practically, the findings imply that pesantren Arabic instruction can strengthen comprehension by institutionalizing routine prompts that target cohesion tracking (pronoun reference, connectors), morphology-based inference (root-pattern cues), and structured repair moves (reread, test meaning against context, justify choices). Assessment practices may also need alignment: if evaluation rewards only correct translation, learners may revert to word-level performance and underuse inference and monitoring strategies. This echoes longstanding principles in comprehension assessment that emphasize capturing meaning construction processes rather than only product accuracy (Valencia & Pearson, 1988). Finally, because the study is a classroom-based qualitative case, its strength lies in explaining "how" and "why" the model supports comprehension, but generalization is naturally limited; future work could extend the design with mixed methods (e.g., pre/post comprehension measures and delayed transfer tasks) while retaining the process-sensitive observation and interview approach that made the present mechanisms visible.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

This article was prepared with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support the writing process. AI was used primarily to help refine academic language, improve clarity and coherence, reorganize paragraphs, and enhance readability in accordance with scholarly conventions. All substantive scholarly decisions—including the formulation of the research problem, research questions, research design, selection of participants, development of instruments, interpretation of qualitative findings, and the final arguments presented—remain the sole responsibility of the authors. The author reviewed, edited, and verified the AI-assisted text to ensure accuracy, originality, and alignment with the study data and relevant literature. The author also ensured that all citations and references were included appropriately and that the final manuscript meets academic integrity standards.

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