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From Difficulty to Understanding: Implementation of the Al-Miftah Lil Ulum Method in Reading Classical Islamic Texts (Kitab Kuning)

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Abstract

Learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is fundamental to mastering classical Islamic literature (*kitab kuning*). However, many students face significant hurdles in grasping the complex grammatical rules of *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology), leading to stagnation and decreased motivation. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method in enhancing students' ability to read unvocalized Arabic texts at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School, Jember. Utilizing a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, and the data were analyzed thematically through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings demonstrate that the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method is effective in improving students' proficiency by utilizing a systematic, scaffolding-based approach that integrates theory and direct practice. Beyond cognitive gains, the method significantly boosts students' learning motivation and self-confidence. Nevertheless, the study identifies that teacher competence, consistency, and variations in students' initial abilities remain critical factors for success. This research concludes that the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method serves as a strategic and applicative alternative for improving Arabic language pedagogy within the *pesantren* tradition.

Keywords: *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum*, Arabic Pedagogy, Kitab Kuning, Nahwu-Sharaf, Pesantren.

Introduction

Learning Arabic plays a pivotal role in supporting students' (*santri*) ability to comprehend classical Islamic literature, particularly the *kitab kuning* (yellow books). Mastery of fundamental Arabic linguistics, specifically *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology), is a primary prerequisite for understanding the structure and meaning of Arabic texts (Husna, 2025; Putri et al., 2025; Hajar & Qohar, 2024). However, for novice students lacking a foundation in these two disciplines, the learning process is often arduous and characterized by various obstacles (Faedurrohman et al., 2023; Maswani et al., 2023; Musa & Ghofur, 2024). These difficulties result in declined learning motivation, low classroom participation, and a

lack of self-confidence (Yunisa, 2022; Arifin et al., 2023). Consequently, these conditions implicate poor student learning outcomes.

In the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) tradition, Arabic occupies a crucial position as the majority of scholarly references utilize it as the primary medium. Therefore, Arabic language learning is generally underpinned by the mastery of *nahwu* and *sharaf* as its core foundation (Ibrahim, 2025; Fauziyah & Abdulloh, 2026; Maulidi, T. 2025). Nevertheless, one of the most significant challenges students face is the ability to read unvocalized Arabic texts (*kitab gundul*), which demands a profound understanding of grammatical rules (Candra & Fanani, 2026; Harfiyah, 2022; Sholehuddin & Wijaya, 2019). Furthermore, traditional learning systems that tend to utilize texts directly without a systematic methodical approach often lead to difficulties in understanding sentence structures, determining *i'rab* (inflection), and capturing the precise meaning of the text (Nurhuda, A. 2022; Putra & Rofi'ah, 2025; Chadziq & Rahman, 2025). This condition frequently causes stagnation in the learning process and diminishes student motivation.

Prior to the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method, the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School (*Pondok Pesantren*) in Jember utilized various instructional methods to teach classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) alongside Arabic grammar rules (*qawā'id nahwu-sharaf*) to its students (*santri*). These legacy pedagogical approaches were employed primarily to enhance the students' proficiency in reading and comprehending unvocalized Arabic texts (*teks Arab gundul*). Specifically, the curriculum integrated the memorization of poetic grammatical treatises (*hafalan nadzam*), the traditional rule-based approach (*metode qawā'id tradisional*), *bandongan*, and *sorogan*.

The application of these diverse methods yielded distinct pedagogical outcomes. The *bandongan* method, conducted in a traditional teacher-centered manner, required the instructor (*ustadz*) to read and elucidate the textual contents while students listened attentively and annotated interlinear glosses in their respective texts. Although this method successfully enhanced the students' passive comprehension of the texts, it offered limited opportunities for developing independent reading skills. Conversely, the *sorogan* method adopted an individualized, one-on-one approach where students read the text directly before the instructor to receive immediate corrective feedback. This technique proved effective in fostering students' confidence and precision in reading *kitab kuning*, while simultaneously increasing their accuracy in grammatical parsing (*i'rāb*); however, its implementation was considerably labor-intensive and time-consuming.

Furthermore, the institution supplemented these efforts with a poetic memorization method (*hafalan nadzam*)—specifically through traditional texts like *Alfiyah Ibnu Malik* and *Al-Jurumiyah*—to reinforce syntax and morphology among students enrolled in extracurricular *kitab* programs. While this rote-learning technique assisted students in theoretically mastering the foundational formulas of the Arabic language, it did not fully translate into applied proficiency when navigating unvocalized texts. Similarly, the traditional *qawā'id* method, which focused on the direct explanation of grammatical rules, contributed significantly to conceptual understanding but often remained non-contextualized in actual textual application.

Consequently, while the execution of these varied traditional methods demonstrated some developmental progress, the resulting proficiency in reading *kitab kuning* remained highly uneven across the student body. A significant segment of the students continued to encounter persistent difficulties in understanding *i'rāb*, determining sentence structures, and independently reading unvocalized Arabic texts. This educational gap aligns with empirical evidence from various studies indicating that traditional instructional approaches frequently fall short of comprehensively and applicatively improving the mastery of syntax and morphology required for functional *kitab kuning* literacy (Solehudin et al., 2026; Nurdin & Anshari, 2024).

In response to these instructional shortcomings, continuous pedagogical innovations have been pursued, culminating in the development and adoption of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method. This systematic method is explicitly structured to facilitate students' understanding of Arabic grammatical rules through a gradual, step-by-step framework. A burgeoning body of literature indicates that such scaffolding-based approaches are highly effective in enhancing both the conceptual mastery of syntax and morphology and the practical ability to read *kitab kuning* (Solehudin et al., 2026; Nurdin & Anshari, 2024).

The primary advantage of *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* lies in its progressive instructional design, which initiates learning with foundational concepts, transitions into contextual examples, and culminates in the direct practice of textual reading (Nurhayati & Anam, 2025; Muwafik, 2025; Ridlo, 2019). Additionally, this method has been empirically proven to bolster students' self-confidence and accelerate their grammatical analysis skills (Makinuddin & Amrulloh, 2026; Anwar et al., 2026; Muhajirin & Zani, 2024). Therefore, the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method serves as a highly relevant and innovative pedagogical solution to meet the demands for a more effective, systematic, and egalitarian approach to *kitab kuning* instruction among contemporary *santri*.

However, most prior research has focused on the effectiveness of the learning method, while comprehensive studies discussing the implementation process in the field remain relatively limited. Research tends to emphasize outcomes over an in-depth analysis of implementation dynamics, including supporting and inhibiting factors. In fact, instructional implementation is often influenced by complex aspects such as teacher readiness, infrastructure limitations, and the alignment of curriculum with social contexts (Awang et al., 2024). Furthermore, research shows that in practice, implementation often encounters obstacles such as low teacher readiness, limited technological skills, and high workloads, which ultimately affect the quality of instructional execution (Ali, 2024). Additionally, teacher readiness in integrating technology and instructional strategies remains highly varied and serves as a key factor for successful implementation (Irmayanti et al., 2024). On the other hand, variations in students' initial abilities are also an important yet often overlooked factor, even though differences in student readiness and characteristics can significantly influence the success of instructional implementation (Preckel & Scherrer, 2025).

Based on preliminary observations at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School in Jember, a gap between theory and practice remains in the application of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method. Despite its implementation, students' *kitab kuning* reading abilities have not shown uniform improvement. Some students still struggle with understanding sentence structures, applying *nahwu-sharaf* rules, and connecting theoretical material with direct reading practice. This indicates that the implementation of the method has not operated optimally within the context of learning at the *pesantren*.

Given these conditions, this study offers novelty in its focus, which not only assesses the improvement of *kitab kuning* reading skills but also comprehensively explores the implementation process of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method. This study encompasses the planning, execution, and evaluation of learning, as well as identifies supporting and inhibiting factors in its application. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more holistic overview of the method's effectiveness in a real-world *pesantren* learning context with diverse student abilities. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method in enhancing students' *kitab kuning* reading skills at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School, Jember. Specifically, this research examines how the method is applied and evaluated by educators, as well as students' responses to its implementation, regarding learning motivation, level of understanding, and the skill of reading unvocalized Arabic texts.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was selected to gain a profound understanding of the phenomena occurring within the learning process, specifically regarding the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method in *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) instruction at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School, Jember. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to comprehensively explore meanings, experiences, and social dynamics through direct interaction with research subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moleong, 2017). The research design utilized is a case study. This design was chosen because the research focuses on a specific location to obtain a deep and contextual understanding of the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method in a real-life *pesantren* setting. A case study allows for a detailed exploration of phenomena, including patterns, processes, and interactions occurring during instructional activities (Yin, 2018).

The participants in this study consist of students (*santri*) and teachers directly involved in *kitab kuning* learning using the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method. Participant selection was conducted using a purposive sampling technique, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as active involvement in the learning process and experience using the aforementioned method (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Data collection techniques in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation, which are the primary methods in qualitative research for obtaining comprehensive and in-depth data. Observation is used to understand phenomena directly in the field, interviews to elicit information from the participants' perspectives, and documentation serves as supporting data to strengthen research findings (Ibrahim, 2010; Ubaidat et al., 2015). Observations were conducted to directly monitor the instructional process and the interaction between teachers and students. Interviews were utilized to obtain detailed information regarding experiences, perceptions, and obstacles encountered during the implementation of the method. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement data in the form of learning notes, instructional tools, and archives of learning activities. The combination of these three techniques aims to enhance data validity through triangulation of sources and methods (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted thematically through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This process aims to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between data to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method and its impact on students' ability to read *kitab kuning*.

Thematic analysis also allows for a systematic and in-depth interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Result and Discussion

Learning *Nahwu* and *Sharaf* in the *Pesantren* Context

The instruction of *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology) within the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) environment holds a highly strategic position as the primary foundation for understanding *kitab kuning*. Mastery of fundamental Arabic linguistics is a prerequisite for comprehending the structural mechanics and semantic meanings of classical Arabic texts (Husna, 2025; Putri et al., 2025; Hajar & Qohar, 2024).

In general, *pesantren* institutions across Indonesia approach *qawā'id nahwu-sharaf* as core diagnostic tools; *sharaf* is utilized to dissect morphological changes within Arabic words, whereas *nahwu* is employed to analyze sentence structures and final-vowel inflections (*i'rāb*). Traditionally, these twin disciplines are delivered through conventional pedagogical methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and the memorization of poetic treatises (*hafalan nadzam*). Students typically progress through foundational texts, ranging from *Al-Jurumiyah* and *Al-Imrithi* to the more advanced *Alfiyah Ibnu Malik*. The instructional sequence generally involves the teacher (*ustadz*) providing theoretical explications of grammatical rules, followed by students memorizing the texts, annotating interlinear meanings, and practicing the reading of unvocalized Arabic scripts.

In the specific context of the Nurul Chotib Islamic Boarding School in Jember, the initial instruction of *nahwu* and *sharaf* strictly adhered to these traditional approaches. The curriculum heavily prioritized rule-based mastery and rote-learning through *bandongan* and *sorogan* sessions. However, preliminary observations and initial study at this institution revealed that novice students frequently encountered substantial difficulties in grasping basic grammatical concepts and reading unvocalized texts (*kitab gundul*) fluently. The cognitive demanding nature of these legacy systems often resulted in diminished learning motivation, low classroom participation, and poor overall student learning outcomes (Faedurrohman et al., 2023; Arifin et al., 2023; Musa & Ghofur, 2024). Traditional learning systems that utilize texts directly without a scaffolded, systematic methodical approach frequently cause stagnation, as beginners struggle to independently determine *i'rāb* and capture precise textual meanings (Nurhuda, 2022; Putra & Rofi'ah, 2025; Chadziq & Rahman, 2025).

Departing from these baseline challenges, the Nurul Chotib Islamic Boarding School began implementing the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method. This method was introduced as a highly

practical, systematic, and accessible alternative specifically designed to accelerate text-reading literacy and bridge the pedagogical gaps faced by novice *santri*.

Implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* Method

To address the challenges students face in understanding *nahwu* and *sharaf* rules, reading unvocalized texts, and maintaining learning motivation, the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method is implemented through a gradual and systematic approach. This method is designed to help students understand Arabic grammar rules incrementally, starting from basic concepts and contextual examples to direct text-reading practices (Nurhayati & Anam, 2025; Muwafik, 2025; Ridlo, 2019). A scaffolding-based approach in instruction has proven effective in improving the mastery of *nahwu* and *sharaf*, as well as the ability to read *kitab kuning* (Solehudin et al., 2026; Nurdin & Anshari, 2024). The detailed operational stages of the implementation in the field are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Field Implementation of *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* Method at Nurul Chotib Islamic Boarding School

Implementation Stage	Activity & Technical Execution	Field Observations
Planning (Perencanaan)	Curriculum mapping and teacher coordination; preparation of level-specific modules.	Focused on aligning the method with the <i>pesantren's</i> traditional schedule.
Execution: Phase 1 (Basic)	Introduction to core grammatical rules using simplified formulas and mnemonic aids.	Novice students focus on recognizing word patterns and basic <i>i'rab</i> .
Execution: Phase 2 (Contextual)	Application of rules using provided examples within the <i>Al-Miftah</i> modules.	Students begin to identify grammatical structures in structured sentences.
Execution: Phase 3 (Direct Practice)	Intensive sessions of reading unvocalized texts (<i>kitab gundul</i>) from classical literature.	Direct application where students analyze sentence structures independently.

Scaffolding & Mentoring	Teachers provide intensive guidance, gradually reducing support as students gain mastery.	Significant impact on students' confidence and participation in classroom dynamics.
Evaluation (Evaluasi)	Periodical assessments of reading fluency and grammatical analysis accuracy.	Identification of progress variations and specific learning obstacles.

Integration of Theory and Practice

The primary merit of this study lies in its empirical integration of theoretical frameworks and practical applications regarding the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School in Jember. The instructional process does not merely culminate in the conceptual mastery of *nahwu* and *sharaf* rules; rather, it extends into systematic exercises in reading and analyzing *kitab kuning*, progressively enabling *santri* to navigate unvocalized texts independently.

In field practice, the training patterns executed at the institution are operationalized through distinct, sequential phases: foundational material introduction, teacher-guided exercises (*ustadz/ustadzah*), intensive daily mentoring, and periodic evaluations. During the initial phase, instructors provide active, explicit guidance to the students. This instructional support is then systematically faded (the *fading* process) as the students' comprehension and capacity to apply the linguistic material autonomously increase. This empirical training pattern demonstrates a concrete application of the scaffolding approach, effectively bridging pedagogical theory with real-world practice within collaborative group learning environments.

The synthesis of theory and practice is directly observable in the students' immediate ability to apply syntactic and morphological rules while reading *kitab kuning*. Consequently, the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method does not merely assist *santri* in internalizing grammatical structures theoretically; it significantly enhances their applied proficiency, academic self-confidence, and functional literacy in decoding unvocalized Arabic texts directly (Makinuddin & Amrulloh, 2026; Anwar et al., 2026; Muhajirin & Zani, 2024). From the perspective of Arabic language pedagogy, this systematic integration accelerates the internalization process of complex language structures, transforming abstract grammatical

formulas into an active reading skill (Ibrahim, 2025; Fauziyah & Abdulloh, 2026; Maulidi, 2025).

Variations in Ability and Supporting Factors

The findings of this study reveal distinct variations in proficiency levels among *santri* undergoing instruction via the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method at the Nurul Chotib Islamic Boarding School in Jember. These variations manifest across several core linguistic competencies, including the mastery of *nahwu* and *sharaf* rules, fluency in reading unvocalized texts (*kitab gundul*), accuracy in determining *i'rāb* (inflection), and structural sentence analysis. While a segment of the student body demonstrated accelerated comprehension and immediate capacity to apply grammatical rules autonomously, another cohort required more prolonged, intensive mentoring and scaffolded exercises to achieve optimal mastery.

Students with prior exposure to basic Arabic linguistics adapted significantly faster to the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* curriculum. These learners exhibited superior speed in identifying sentence patterns, establishing syntactic positions, and mapping morphological transformations. Conversely, absolute beginners—those lacking any structural background in *nahwu* and *sharaf*—encountered noticeable bottlenecks during the initial instructional phases, particularly in internalizing abstract grammatical terminology and translating these rules onto unvocalized scripts.

Beyond cognitive baselines, variations also emerged within affective domains, specifically regarding student self-confidence and active engagement. Advanced or quick-adapting students consistently displayed high levels of participation during live reading practices and peer discussions. In contrast, novice students frequently exhibited hesitation and a lack of academic confidence when required to decode texts or justify syntactic structures independently. This variance is largely driven by individual learning readiness, the intensity of independent practice, and personal learning motivation.

Furthermore, this study identified several critical supporting factors that directly underpin the successful implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method. The first factor is teacher competence; instructors at the institution are highly experienced and systematically trained, enabling them to demystify complex rules into accessible pedagogical units. The second factor pertains to the methodological architecture itself, which relies on a standardized, highly concise, and scaffolded curriculum integrated with bilingual (Arabic-Indonesian) mnemonic verses (*nadzam*).

The third factor is the conducive institutional environment of the *pesantren*. The instruction is heavily routinized through daily sessions (excluding holidays) and is intentionally synchronized across both the traditional boarding environment and the formal *diniyah* (Islamic schooling) system. This systemic reinforcement, coupled with organic habits of *kitab kuning* reading and high-frequency instructor-student interactions, creates a robust linguistic ecosystem. Finally, the seamless availability of proprietary *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* modules, auxiliary texts, and diversified learning media substantially accelerates the overall instructional velocity.

Impact on Learning Motivation

From an affective perspective, the empirical application of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method at the Nurul Chotib Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a profound positive impact on student learning motivation, particularly in *kitab kuning* literacy. Triangulated data derived from field observations and qualitative interviews indicate a substantial surge in student enthusiasm and active classroom behavioral engagement. The systematic and accessible presentation of material within this method effectively increases students' active engagement. This aligns with findings suggesting that critical instructional barriers, such as a lack of self-confidence and low participation, can be successfully overcome through appropriate pedagogical approaches (Yunisa, 2022; Arifin et al., 2023).

Rather than succumbing to the cognitive fatigue typically associated with legacy instruction, *santri* exhibited heightened stamina and drive when learning *nahwu* and *sharaf*. This affective shift is heavily corroborated by concrete performance metrics within the study's data, including routine institutional evaluations, oral examinations (*ujian lisan*), and live text-decoding practices. These data streams consistently revealed measurable progress in oral reading fluency, contextual accuracy of *i'rāb*, and semantic comprehension. Because the curriculum is structured to be highly systemic, practical, and engaging, it naturally demystifies complex linguistic hurdles. The strategic deployment of contextual examples paired with immediate application on unvocalized scripts (*kitab gundul*) successfully illustrates the direct utility of grammatical rules, thereby mitigating student frustration.

This observable increase in learner motivation and classroom participation clearly demonstrates that this method influences not only cognitive aspects but also affective ones. These findings can be critically analyzed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, specifically regarding intrinsic and extrinsic motivational constructs:

First, Intrinsic Motivation. As the *Al-Miftah* framework breaks down dense grammatical concepts into accessible, digestible components, students experience an

immediate sense of cognitive competence. This sudden ease of understanding removes previous instructional barriers, fostering a genuine internal drive, curiosity, and autonomous desire to master the language from within.

Second, Extrinsic Motivation and Scaffolding. Conversely, the extrinsic motivational architecture is reinforced through structured institutional support. In alignment with Vygotsky's **Scaffolding Theory**, the systematic, phased guidance provided by the instructors (*ustadz/ustadzah*) ensures that students are never left unassisted within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This instructional safety net, coupled with verbal affirmations, positive reinforcement, and peer recognition during public readings, substantially elevates the students' academic self-confidence and minimizes performance anxiety.

Consequently, the pedagogical architecture of *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* simultaneously optimizes both cognitive retention and affective growth, transforming text-reading from a daunting academic obligation into a rewarding, self-affirming learning process.

Implications and Limitations

The findings of this study affirm that the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method is an effective approach for enhancing students' *kitab kuning* reading skills through gradual and systematic instruction. However, its implementation is still affected by several limitations, such as variations in students' initial abilities and suboptimal supporting factors. Therefore, strengthening implementation strategies and supporting instructional facilities is necessary to maximize learning outcomes.

Overall, this research demonstrates that the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method contributes positively to improving the *kitab kuning* reading abilities of students at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School, Jember, in both cognitive and affective dimensions, despite the ongoing challenges that require attention during execution.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method at the Nurul Chotib Jombang Islamic Boarding School, Jember, is effective in enhancing students' (*santri*) proficiency in reading *kitab kuning*. This improvement is particularly evident in the students' ability to comprehend and apply the rules of *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharaf* (morphology) more systematically and applicatively within the analysis

of unvocalized Arabic texts (*kitab gundul*). These findings suggest that the gradual approach employed in this method optimally facilitates the internalization process of language structures.

Furthermore, the application of this method significantly impacts the affective domain, specifically by increasing students' motivation and self-confidence during the instructional process. Students are not only capable of understanding theoretical rules but also demonstrate improved proficiency in analyzing and interpreting texts independently. This underscores that the integration of conceptual reinforcement and direct practice serves as a vital factor in instructional success. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method is inextricably linked to several supporting factors, including teacher competence, consistency in methodological execution, the use of appropriate instructional media, and the students' initial ability levels. Variations in these factors influence the degree of success achieved by each student.

In conclusion, the *Al-Miftah Lil Ulum* method may be considered a strategic alternative for enhancing the quality of Arabic language pedagogy in *pesantren*, particularly in strengthening the ability to read and comprehend *kitab kuning* in a more systematic, applicative, and contextual manner.

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