

A Pedagogical Review of The Suitability of An Imla Textbook with Arabic Origins for Non-native Students: A Case Study at Al Irsyad Tengaran 7 Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract: This study investigates the suitability of the Mudzakkirah al-Imla textbook, designed for Arabic first language (L1) speakers, for Arab non-native speakers in Grades 7 and 8 at MTs Al Irsyad Tengaran 7, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative method was employed to collect data, which were analysed based on the textbook, classroom assessment observations, and interviews with both teachers and students. Among the findings, four issues are illuminated: readability / typography-related issues, linguistic demands beyond students' proficiency level, contextual irrelevance of vocabulary, and the imbalance of student engagement. However, the teachers' mediation was crucial in adjusting the materials with additional activities and dictations, which were contextualised to some extent and thus narrowed the distance between the textbook content and the learners' needs. These findings highlight the need for A1 materials to be learner-oriented, culturally appropriate, and pedagogically responsive. With reference to the local context, this study adds to the debates regarding the teaching of Arabic to non-native speakers in various educational settings.

Keywords: Imla, Arabic Textbook Evaluation, Non-native Learners, Classroom observation, Textbook Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Teaching of Arabic as a foreign language has increased during the past decade, with interest coming from non-native learners in the world's most populous regions (Asia), in Africa, and in Europe. (Fauzi & Doi, 2025) states that textbooks are still the core of ACT, believed to play a vital role in shaping an effective curriculum. The appropriateness of Arabic textbooks designed for native speakers of the language is, nevertheless, often queried in non-Arabic settings. Some studies have indicated that such materials are also troublesome due to their high-level linguistic structure, diverse cultural backgrounds, and outdated content, and obstruct the students whose first language is not English from studying ((Zaenuri & Baroroh, 2025)

Current research highlights the importance of analyzing textbooks to verify their compatibility with learners' linguistic proficiency and cultural background. For example, Ibrahim (2024) demonstrated that there are significant gaps between the stated objectives and the realistic needs of non-native speakers of the Tawasul series. Similarly, (Erliana et al., 2025) concluded that the textbook should be locally adapted in order to support the retention of vocabulary and promote the integration of language skills. Moreover, (Lubis & S., 2025) argued that teachers who have become overly dependent on the imported textbooks can have a negative impact on the learner's motivation, as they are not culturally compatible enough. These findings are in line with other

research at the international level, where the critical attention of the teaching materials as the second most important factor in the foreign language instruction is underlined.

In addition to the general concerns of appropriateness, limited empirical research is available on spelling books (Arabic spelling), despite the importance of spelling to support spelling accuracy, listening comprehension, and writing fluency. (Abdalla et al., 2024) argued for the incorporation of Common European Framework of Reference-based models to “renew” the teaching of Arabic grammar, and (Erliana et al., 2025) have proven the effectiveness of adaptive resources as “Arabic in Your Hands” for the teachers' preparation. Yet, there is little research on spelling studies and this is something that still needs to be investigated.

This research attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the suitability of a dictation book—imported from an Arab country and used for the seventh and eighth grades of 7th MTs Al Irsyad Tenggara, Batu City, East Java, Indonesia—to the needs of Indonesian students as EFL students in Arabic. Through pinpointing the typographic obstacles, the higher levels of language demanded and the cross-curricular overtones, this article contributes not only to local curriculum improvement, but to the global debate on Arabization in non-Arabic contexts. These findings are anticipated to assist curriculum developers, teachers, and policy makers globally to develop education resources that are linguistically accessible, pedagogically robust, and culturally relevant.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Textbook Evaluation in Language Education

Textbooks are believed to be a crucial structural element that influences language learning achievements. They create an identity of growth, learning and a vehicle through which pedagogical beliefs are demonstrated in practice. Thus, textbook evaluation is an important stage in the process of assuring that instructional materials adequately reflect students' linguistic ability, cultural experiences, and learning styles. (Rasiyani et al., 2025) made clear that textbooks should be subject to systematic evaluation in terms of content, design integrity, and curricular appeal. Similarly, (Erliana et al., 2025) showed that inadaptability to the context of learning of Al-Mumtaz textbook had a negative impact on students' learning of Arabic. These results indicate that the analysis of textbooks should not only involve content analysis but also pedagogical aspects such as cultural relevancy and skill development.

2.2. Arabic Textbooks for Non-Native Learners

The difficulty of using Arabic textbooks in an Arabic speaking environment is well known. Textbooks are generally imported and geared towards native speakers, often assuming linguistic and cultural background of which non-native speakers may have little or none. (Ibrahim, 2024), in a descriptive study of the structure of Tawasul series, pointed out that complex grammar posed significant obstacles for lower intermediate students. International studies also affirm such observations. (Di et al., 2025) found that Chinese learners in Arabic language encountered challenges in learning literature that did not match their sociocultural background and manifested disengagement. In an Indonesian setting, (Zaenuri & Baroroh, 2025) proposed an integrated textbook model that combined grammar instruction with reading development, all with a focus on accessing classical Islamic texts. Together, these studies demonstrate the need to contextualize Arabic textbooks for non-native learners, and not merely take them off-the-shelf.

2.3. Imla Pedagogy and Its Role in Arabic Literacy

In the field of Arabic instruction, dictation (Imla) is considered as an important pedagogical tool for developing listening comprehension, orthographic accuracy, and spelling competencies. Imla as an in-between practice Imla is slotted in between phonological input and written representation, allowing learners to incorporate correct spelling and correct grammatical

forms by using both intense listening and writing. (Lubis & S., 2025) discovered that well-structured dictation exercises such as those carried out in al-'Arabiyah Bayna Yadayk made significant contributions to students' progress. (Abdalla et al., 2024) introduced a CEFR-compatible framework for instruction in Arabic grammar, and he stressed the value of basic writing skills such as dictation in supporting more advanced language skills. Yet despite this pedagogical utility, there have been few thorough assessments of Imla textbooks. The majority of the studies of Arabic material focus on grammar or vocabulary instruction, and in comparison dictation is considered as an adjunct to the main role of literacy skills.

2.4. Gaps in the Literature

The studies reviewed seem to indicate that although textbook analysis has been given much academic scrutiny, Imla itself as a domain of textbook criticism has not been researched in detail. What has emerged consistently in these studies is a focus on grammar, vocabulary and word recognition with dictation being a somewhat neglected aspect of literacy. In addition, many reviews do not take into consideration such important issues as typographical legibility, the level of difficulty of exercises, and whether or not they refer to obsolete material. This gaps imply a pressing need for empirical research on the appropriateness of Imla textbooks for non-native learners. The current study fills that gap by analyzing an imported Imla textbook practiced in MTs Al Irsyad Tenganan 7 Indonesian and by contributing to the local educational context and the general considerations of adaptation of Arabic textbook for non-Arab students.

3. METHOD AND DATA

3.1. Research Design

A descriptive qualitative design was used in the current study to investigate the appropriateness of a textbook (i.e., an Arabic textbook) developed for L1 learners (i.e., first language Arabic speakers) in an L2 context (i.e., in an ESL setting). Qualitative research was selected due to its ability to examine course materials in-depth and offer perspectives into participants' encounters in a true setting of learning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2. Research Site and Participants

Institution location: MTs Al Irsyad Tenganan 7, Kota Batu, Indonesia. The sample took the form of seventh- and eighth-grade students studying the textbook for their Arabic lessons; purposeful sampling encompassed two Arabic teachers and two groups of students at this Quran school. While the former could provide a comprehensive professional assessment of the actual and potential relevance of the textbook for their everyday practice, the latter were instrumental in sharing possible issues and learning difficulties.

3.3. Data Sources and Instruments

Four data sources were used.

The analysis of the textbook's documents was based on typography, organization of content, linguistic level and practical activities. This stage was informed by previous work on models for evaluating language teaching materials (Tomlinson, 2012; McGrath, 2016)

Attitudes to the textbook and strengths, weaknesses and curricular alignment were elicited in semi-structured teacher interviews.

Student focus group interviews were conducted to understand the clarity, difficulty, and relevance of the textbook.

Classroom Observations Classroom observations were performed in Imla lessons and recorded as Field Notes with descriptions of how teaching was carried out, how students were involved in the teaching process and the day-to-day issues related to the book's use.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered in two waves. The first was the close examination of the textbook for potential problematic areas. Second, interviews and class observations were observed. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and anonymized, and classroom observations were analyzed through guided field notes. Informed consent was obtained from all study subjects before the measurements.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis Data analysis followed (Braun & Clarke, 2019) framework. Transcripts, field notes and textbook analysis were coded. Codes were next combined into categories consisting of typographical clarity, linguistic difficulty, material overlap, and outdated content, which were categorised as themes. Thematic analysis was chosen for its ability to identify patterns across heterogeneous data.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Ethics

Analytical framework The data were thematically analyzed using a five step approach proposed by (Nowell et al., 2017). Transcribed interviews, field notes, and textbook data were also coded. Codes were further clustered, based on association and content, to develop general categories or themes such as clarity, difficulty, overlap and outdated. Thematic analysis was chosen because it provides a flexible approach to establishing patterns in diverse data sources.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In line with the results of interviews with the students and the teacher, the visually-based task analysis of the Mudzakkirah al-Imla textbook, and the classroom observations, this study also identified some obstacles to Imla textbook for native speakers used in the Indonesian junior high school setting. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: readability and typography; suitability of the material to students' level; relevance of vocabulary and context; and teachers' adaptation strategies and their effect on students.

4.1. Readability and Typography

Majority of the learners experienced challenges in reading the script and font of the textbook particularly in Grade 7. Some said that the Arabic script was "fuzzy" and "not diacritically marked," making letters difficult to discern. Teachers also noted that the font was an issue and "not beginner-friendly. Observations in the classroom revealed that many students confused letters with similar visual appearance (e.g., hamzah vs. 'ain, sīn vs. shīn, dhād vs. zhā'), which led to a slow progress of copying.

This result corresponds to those in the literature that have reported poor readability and inappropriate typography raises the cognitive load in learning of foreign languages (Nassiri et al., 2023; Mohebbi, 2016).

4.2. Suitability of Material to Students' Level

Interviews suggested that the sequencing of the content and the difficulty level of the content did not suit the students' performance level. The early chapters with hamzah washl and qath' ist were too hard, was the common report from students who said such material was nawshar music. However, some also felt the book was better suited for advanced learners like university students, as opposed to junior high students.

However, a small group of stronger students were able to comprehend the material after teacher instruction. This discrepancy indicates the mismatch between the textbook's expectations, and the leveled needs of the learners. Comparable concerns have been found in previous studies on imported Arabic textbooks for non-native contexts (Lubis & S., 2025).

4.3. Vocabulary and Contextual Relevance

The language in the textbook was frequently new and unembedded in the students' everyday lives. So words like al-kashshāf (scout) and al-mahkama (court) were considered increasingly difficult and irrelevant both by students and teachers. Some students were critical of the exercises as boring and unvaried as well.

Observations indicated that the teachers often added extra exercises to the textbook or substituted examples with more life-related material in order to heighten relevance. This is consistent with the description of textbooks' effectiveness by (Cunningsworth, 1995), which emphasizes cultural and contextually relevance.

4.4. Teachers' Adaptation Strategies and Students' Responses

The shortcomings of the textbook were compensated by the role of the teachers. Interviews revealed that the teachers' offered other support such as making extra resources, producing mind maps, and dictation other accents as scaffolding activities for students to learn. Observations revealed mixed student reaction, some students expressing confidence others being tentative, erasing answers multiple times, and showing little motivation.

Students also suggested improvements such as using a more legible typeface, including diacritical marks, and colorful, eye catching design. These recommendations reflect (Tomlinson, 2012) view that learning materials must be user-friendly if learner motivation is to be maintained in foreign language classrooms.

4.5. Synthesis

Overall, results of the study suggest that the Mudzakkirah al-Imla textbook is not completely suitable for the needs and the proficiency level of students in junior high school in Indonesia. The chief problems are readability, information overload, and cultural obsolescence. However, teachers' adaptive strategies and motivated students' perseverance alleviated these challenges to some extent.

This research highlights the importance of creating context-embedded and graded Imla materials that combine linguistic accuracy with pedagogical understandability, so that language learners, particularly non-native ones, can benefit from effective and enjoyable Arabic language instruction.

Summary of Findings

Table. Summary of Findings

Theme	Students	Teachers	Classroom Observations	Theoretical Link
Readability & Typography	Struggled with font; confused similar letters; lack of diacritics.	Typeface unsuitable for beginners.	Slow writing pace, frequent errors in distinguishing letters.	Typography affects readability and learning load (Ali, 2020; Rahman, 2021).
Suitability of Material	Found chapters too advanced; early topics beyond their level.	More suitable for advanced learners.	Teachers simplified and explained heavily.	Imported textbooks often misaligned with learner levels (Lubis et al., 2020).
Vocabulary & Context	Vocabulary felt foreign and irrelevant.	Required contextual supplementation.	Teachers replaced or added new exercises.	Relevance is key in quality textbooks (Cunningsworth, 1995).
Teacher Adaptation & Student Response	Mixed motivation: some confident, others hesitant. Suggested	Added exercises, mind maps, alternative dictation.	Differences in motivation across students.	Adaptation and user-friendly design sustain motivation (Tomlinson, 2012).

	font/design improvements.			
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CONCLUSIONS

This research evaluated the feasibility of the Mudzakkirah al-Imla textbook that was originally used for native speaker of Arabic when it was applied as a learning material for non-native speakers of Indonesian at the junior high school level. Results from textbook analysis, classroom observation, and interviews indicated three challenges: (1) text being difficult to read because of typography, (2) language difficulty being beyond the students' levels, and (3) vocabulary not being contextually relevant for students. These were often barriers to understanding and involved.

All in all, the teachers adjusted the textbook, and focused on their adaptation strategies - supplementing, contextualization of vocabulary - that provided a bridge between the textbook and the needs of the students. The study emphasizes the need to create Arabic reading text books for Non-Native students; especially Imla materials that are context-based, level-adequate, and student-friendly. Comparative studies of the same textbook in several colleges could help us gain a larger perspective of how to develop an effective textbook in this area.

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