

Integrating Metalinguistic Awareness into Arabic Teacher Education and Curriculum Innovation

Erna Dwi Widiya Ningrum*¹, Siti Sulaikho², Dinda Fadhiilla Novarinda³, Nisa Ul Afiyah⁴
^{a)} Universitas KH.A. Wahab Hasbullah, Indonesia ^{b)} Universitas KH.A. Wahab Hasbullah,
Indonesia ^{c)} Universitas KH.A. Wahab Hasbullah, Indonesia ^{d)} Universitas KH.A. Wahab
Hasbullah, Indonesia

¹ ernawidiya22@gmail.com ² ikho.zul@unwaha.ac.id@gmail.com
³ dindapbaunwaha@gmail.com ⁴ nisaulcahayu27@gmail.com

*ernawidiya22@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines how metalinguistic awareness can be systematically integrated into Arabic teacher education and curriculum innovation. Recognizing metalinguistic awareness as a foundation for reflective pedagogy, the research investigates the extent to which Arabic teachers in Jombang District demonstrate analytical sensitivity to language form and function. Drawing on a quantitative design involving 19 educators, the study employs multivariate statistical modeling to identify key predictors of metalinguistic competence across the domains of *istima'* (listening), *tarakib* (grammar), and *qiro'ah* (reading). Findings reveal that grammatical awareness serves as the pivotal factor influencing teachers' overall linguistic reflection, mediating the relationship between comprehension and production skills. These results highlight a structural imbalance within current teacher training frameworks, where theoretical mastery often exceeds reflective practice. The paper proposes a developmental model for embedding metalinguistic training into professional preparation programs, aligning curriculum content with the cognitive demands of Arabic pedagogy. The study contributes both empirically and conceptually to the discourse on teacher cognition, offering practical directions for designing responsive and sustainable Arabic language education.

Keywords: Arabic Teacher Education, Curriculum Innovation, Metalinguistic Awareness, Reflective Pedagogy, Teacher Cognition.

Introduction

Arabic language learning in Indonesia today shows an interesting duality between classical tradition and the demands of modernity. Historically, many formal educational institutions and madrasas have emphasized vocabulary memorization, mastery of classical texts, and the ability to read classical Arabic texts as top priorities (Azizah et al., 2024). This approach allows students to understand the structure of the language in theory, but often does not prepare them to use Arabic communicatively and contextually (Munip et al., 2019). The dominance of this traditional method is still reflected in teacher-centered teaching patterns, where teachers are the center of knowledge, while students play a passive role. As a result, students' ability to speak, listen, write, and interact in Arabic is relatively limited, even though they have good theoretical mastery.

In addition to linguistic factors, non-linguistic aspects also pose significant obstacles. Low student motivation, varying teacher quality, limited learning time, and an unsupportive learning environment are factors that weaken the effectiveness of learning. Some schools still view Arabic solely as a tool for understanding religious texts, rather than as a dynamic and communicative language discipline (MAULIDIN et al., 2024). This view indirectly limits teachers' scope to develop innovative learning methods that can improve students' productive skills, especially in speaking and listening.

In Jombang District, this phenomenon is clearly evident. The dynamics of Arabic language learning are highly complex, influenced by structural, pedagogical, and contextual challenges. One of the main issues is the lack of teachers' metalinguistic awareness. Although some teachers understand basic linguistic concepts such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics many find it difficult to explain these concepts operationally to students. This makes teachers' linguistic knowledge theoretical and not fully integrated into reflective and analytical learning practices (Sibomana, 2017). As a result, the teaching strategies used tend to be repetitive and less responsive to students' needs (Purwita et al., 2025). This gap between theory and practice is also reflected in the focus of language skills development. Although the curriculum emphasizes the development of four language skills *qiro'ah* (reading), *kitabah* (writing), *istima'* (listening), and *kalam* (speaking) the reality in the field shows that teachers place more emphasis on *qiro'ah* and *kitabah*, while *istima'* and *kalam* are often marginalized. This creates an imbalance in students' language abilities, preventing their communicative skills from developing optimally.

Another factor that affects the quality of learning is the limited facilities and supporting resources. Many schools do not have adequate multimedia rooms, audio-lingual devices, or sufficient digital teaching materials (Liu, 2023). These limitations reduce the variety of learning activities that teachers can implement, making the classroom atmosphere monotonous. From the students' perspective, their motivation to learn Arabic is also relatively low. The general perception that Arabic is a difficult subject affects students' attitudes, engagement, and perseverance in class, making teachers' innovation efforts even more crucial (Salmas, 2020; Siswa et al., 2025).

Despite facing various challenges, Arabic language learning in Jombang is not completely stagnant. Several innovations have begun to be implemented, such as language games, communicative approaches, project-based activities, and the use of educational technology. The use of digital media, learning applications, and other interactive resources provides

opportunities for teachers and students to access more contextual and engaging materials. The integration of these innovations has been shown to increase student motivation, interest, and engagement in the learning process, paving the way for overall improvement in teaching quality.

The literature confirms that metalinguistic awareness is an important foundation in learning a new language. Metalinguistic awareness enables a person to consciously understand, analyze, and manipulate language, so that language mastery is not merely memorization, but becomes a reflective and analytical skill. Research shows that bilingual and multilingual children generally have an advantage in metalinguistic tasks, which has a positive impact on their ability to read, write, and understand grammar in several languages at once (Bialystok et al., 2010). Recent studies also confirm the significant influence of metalinguistic awareness on writing skills. (Riehl et al., 2021) found that writing ability in a second language is highly dependent on metalinguistic awareness, as the writing process requires reflection, analysis of language structure, and the ability to consciously revise texts. Another study by (Baoqi et al., 2021) highlights that foreign language reading ability is also greatly influenced by students' level of metalinguistic awareness. Meanwhile, Torregrossa et al. (2022) emphasized that in the context of second language learning, metalinguistic awareness plays a greater role than in the first language because learners must actively monitor vocabulary, rules, and structures that are not yet automatic for them.

Metalinguistic awareness does not arise automatically, but can be enhanced through various learning strategies, such as explicit practice, bilingual experiences, reflective activities, language comparison analysis, and communicative tasks in the classroom (Torregrossa et al., 2023). These approaches enable students to “see language from outside themselves,” understand how language works systematically, and apply that knowledge in language practice. In other words, metalinguistic awareness is not only a pillar of language proficiency, but also opens up opportunities for broader academic development and multilingual skills.

Based on these social facts and literature, this study aims to confirm that Arabic teachers with high metalinguistic competence tend to be able to innovate in learning, while teachers with low metalinguistic competence tend to only apply template-based learning, imitating previous practices without integrating new strategies or methods. Thus, teachers' metalinguistic competence is an important indicator of their ability to design reflective, analytical, and communicative learning, which will ultimately have an impact on the overall quality of students' Arabic language proficiency. This study is expected to contribute to the development of teacher capacity, the design of a more adaptive curriculum, and pedagogical innovation in Arabic language learning in Indonesia, particularly in the context of Jombang District.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 19 Arabic language teachers from Madrasah Aliyah (MA) schools in the Jombang sub-district. Eligibility criteria required participants to be actively teaching Arabic at the MA level and willing to participate in the study. No specific demographic restrictions were applied beyond the requirement of teaching experience in the target context. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-analytical design. The primary objective was to examine the metalinguistic awareness of Arabic language teachers in Jombang. The study did not involve experimental manipulations; teachers were observed and assessed in their natural teaching context. The data were collected cross-sectionally, without the creation of multiple experimental conditions. This design allows for descriptive statistical analysis of the current levels of metalinguistic competence among the participants.

Materials and Instrumentation

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire developed to measure teachers' metalinguistic awareness. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items across three levels, assessing competencies in *istima'* (listening), *qiro'ah* (reading), and *tarakib* (syntax/grammar). The instrument was designed based on previously established frameworks of metalinguistic assessment (references can be added if adapted from existing scales) and was reviewed by language experts to ensure content validity. Each item was scored according to a standardized rubric, yielding a composite score for each participant.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted through the administration of the questionnaire. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaire in their schools during non- instructional hours to minimize disruption. The instructions were standardized to ensure consistency across participants, and researchers were available to clarify any ambiguities without influencing responses. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to prevent information sharing among participants.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaires were first entered and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Each participant's score on metalinguistic competence was computed as a composite of the three assessed dimensions: *istima'* (listening), *qiro'ah* (reading), and *tarakib* (syntax/grammar). Based on the total scores, participants were then grouped into three categories representing low, medium, and high metalinguistic competence. To examine statistically significant differences among these groups, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted, as the data did not meet the assumption of normality for parametric tests. Where significant differences were found, post hoc analyses were performed to determine which specific groups differed from each other. This approach allowed the study to identify patterns in teacher metalinguistic competence and assess how these differences might relate to their pedagogical practices.

Result and discussion

This study involved 19 Arabic teachers in the Jombang subdistrict. Data was obtained through a metalinguistic competency questionnaire covering three domains, namely *istima'*, *qiro'ah*, and *tarakib*. Each domain had a raw score which was then converted into a scale score to facilitate categorization.

RESPONDENTS	PURELY SCORE			SCALE SCORE			TOTAL SCALE SCORE	TOTAL METALINGUISTIC SCORE
	ISTIM A	TARA KIB	QIRO' AH	ISTIM A	TARA KIB	QIRO' AH		
1	20	60	28	38,4	53,2	41,36	132,96	443,2
2	16	65	23	36,92	55,05	39,51	131,48	438,2667
3	15	76	29	36,55	59,12	41,73	137,4	458
4	14	68	25	36,18	56,16	40,25	132,59	441,9667
5	16	71	22	36,92	57,27	39,14	133,33	444,4333
6	11	68	24	35,07	56,16	39,88	131,11	437,0333
7	19	65	23	38,03	55,05	39,51	132,59	441,9667
8	19	79	25	38,03	60,23	40,25	138,51	461,7
9	18	77	26	37,66	59,49	40,62	137,77	459,2333
10	15	83	28	36,55	61,71	41,36	139,62	465,4
11	14	60	14	36,18	53,2	36,18	125,56	418,5333
12	13	61	14	35,81	53,57	36,18	125,56	418,5333
13	14	80	27	36,18	60,6	40,99	137,77	459,2333
14	18	73	22	37,66	58,01	39,14	134,81	449,3667
15	17	76	26	37,29	59,12	40,62	137,03	456,7667
16	19	82	30	38,03	61,34	42,1	141,47	471,5667
17	12	68	21	35,44	56,16	38,77	130,37	434,5667
18	15	74	22	36,55	58,38	39,14	134,07	446,9
19	15	66	24	36,55	55,42	39,88	131,85	439,5

Based on the calculation results, the range of metalinguistic scores obtained by Arabic teachers in Jombang subdistrict was between 418 and 472. Based on the existing categories, Arabic teachers in Jombang subdistrict were classified as having “intermediate” metalinguistic awareness.

RESPONDENTS	TOTAL METALINGUISTIC SCORE	CATEGORY
1	443,2	Intermediate
2	438,2667	Intermediate

CATEGORY	SCORE
Basic	310 - 399
Intermediate	400 - 499

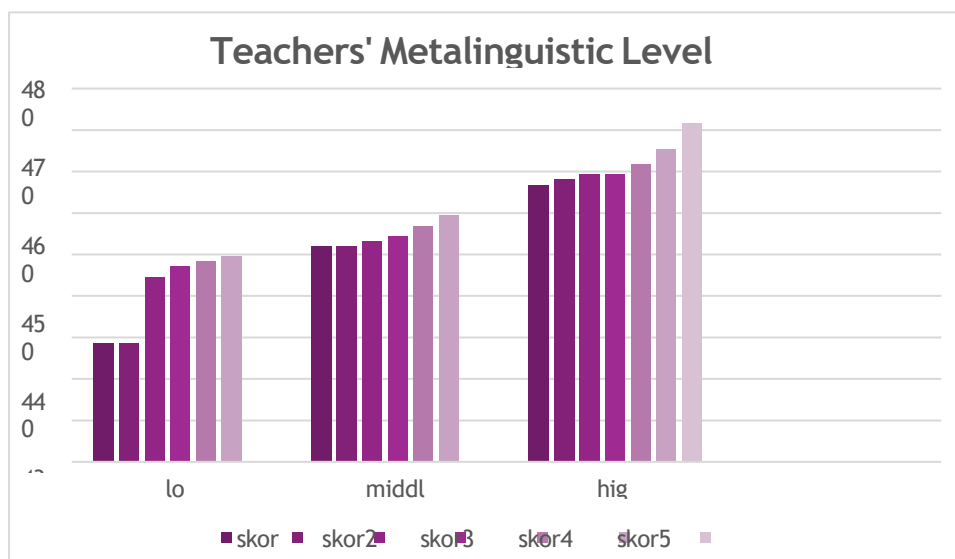
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3	458	Intermediate
4	441,9667	Intermediate
5	444,4333	Intermediate
6	437,0333	Intermediate
7	441,9667	Intermediate
8	461,7	Intermediate
9	459,2333	Intermediate
10	465,4	Intermediate
11	418,5333	Intermediate
12	418,5333	Intermediate
13	459,2333	Intermediate
14	449,3667	Intermediate
15	456,7667	Intermediate
16	471,5667	Intermediate
17	434,5667	Intermediate
18	446,9	Intermediate
19	439,5	Intermediate

Advance	500 - 599
Academic	600 - 677

N	19
Mean	446,64
Standard Deviation	14,45
High Group Threshold	≥ 453.86
Low Group Threshold	≤ 439.42

Grouping Classification Based on Mean 446,64 (± 0.5 SD)



TOTAL METALINGUISTIC SCORE	CATEGORY
418,53	LOW
418,53	LOW
434,57	LOW
437,03	LOW
438,27	LOW
439,50	LOW
441,97	MIDDLE
441,97	MIDDLE
443,20	MIDDLE
444,43	MIDDLE
446,90	MIDDLE
449,37	MIDDLE
456,77	HIGH
458,00	HIGH
459,23	HIGH
459,23	HIGH
461,70	HIGH
465,40	HIGH
471,57	HIGH

Participants were classified into higher and lower metalinguistic competence groups using a norm-referenced criterion based on the sample distribution. Following (Cohen et al., 2017), a threshold of ± 0.5 SD from the sample mean was applied to differentiate levels within the intermediate proficiency band. Teachers scoring ≥ 453.86 were categorized as the higher-competence group, whereas those scoring ≤ 439.42 formed the lower-competence group. Scores within 439.43–453.85 were treated as mid-range.

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	SKOR METALINGUISTIK
Kruskal-Wallis H	9,536
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	,008
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: KODE KELOMPOK	

Comparison	p-value	Significant (α Bonferroni = 0.0167)
Low vs Middle	0,0049	Significant
Low vs High	0,0033	Significant
Middle vs High	0,0033	Significant

The Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there were differences in metalinguistic competence scores among the three groups of teachers, namely low, middle, and high. The results of the analysis showed that there were significant differences between groups ($H = 9.536$ $p = 0.008$). This finding indicates that the level of metalinguistic competence among teachers is not uniform; there are groups that consistently demonstrate higher abilities than other groups.

To identify which groups were significantly different, a Mann Whitney test with Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = 0.0167$) was performed. The results showed that:

1. The low group was significantly different from the middle group ($p = 0.0049$).

This confirms that teachers with low metalinguistic competence scores have significantly lower scores than teachers with medium competence.

2. The low group was significantly different from the high group ($p = 0.0033$).

This difference further confirms that there is a fairly strong gap in metalinguistic abilities between teachers in the low and high categories.

3. The middle group was significantly different from the high group ($p = 0.0033$).

This difference shows a consistent increase in ability from the middle to the high level.

Overall, the three groups showed consistent and significant differences. These findings show that teachers' metalinguistic competence forms a clear spectrum, with the low group at the lower end and the high group at the top. These differences are not only statistically significant, but also reflect different qualities of linguistic reflection in teaching practice. The present study investigates the metalinguistic competence of Arabic language teachers in Madrasah Aliyah (MA), highlighting the pedagogical implications of varying levels of linguistic awareness: low, middle, and high. The findings provide insights into the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and instructional strategies, particularly in terms of promoting innovative versus repetitive teaching practices.

Analysis of the collected data reveals distinct patterns among teachers with different levels of metalinguistic competence. Teachers classified as high competence consistently demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of Arabic grammar, phonology, and morphology, enabling them to consciously analyze linguistic structures and anticipate common learner errors. For example, Teacher A could break down complex verb forms and guide students to recognize root patterns, fostering not only grammatical accuracy but also analytical thinking. These teachers frequently incorporated reflective strategies such as guided discovery and error analysis, aligning with the concept of informed instruction where explicit knowledge informs pedagogical decisions

(Bialystok et al., 2010). Such reflective practice enhanced student engagement and autonomy, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (*Engaging Students in Education for Sustainable Development*, n.d.; Wang et al., 2023).

In contrast, teachers with low metalinguistic competence relied heavily on rote memorization and formulaic teaching (Bass et al., 2024; Calafato, 2025). Classroom observations indicated that Teacher D, for instance, emphasized repetitive drilling of nominal and verbal sentences without providing explanations for grammatical patterns, resulting in limited student interaction and minimal reflective practice. This observation is consistent with prior research demonstrating that limited linguistic awareness constrains teachers' instructional flexibility, leading to conventional teaching routines. Students exposed to such repetitive practices often displayed surface-level engagement, focusing on memorization rather than deep linguistic understanding.

Teachers in the middle competence range exhibited a hybrid instructional approach. They demonstrated partial awareness of linguistic structures and occasionally provided meta-linguistic explanations, but application in teaching was inconsistent. Teacher B, for example, could explain plural formation rules but tended to default to traditional exercises, limiting opportunities for exploratory learning. This intermediate group underscores the transitional potential where targeted professional development can enhance the integration of metalinguistic awareness into more innovative pedagogical practices.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are profound. High-level competence facilitates innovative teaching, allowing teachers to implement interactive strategies such as comparative morphological analysis, syntactic parsing, and phonological games that stimulate cognitive engagement. Conversely, low-level competence tends to maintain repetitive, drill-based instruction, which, while efficient for short-term retention, lacks transformative potential. Middle-level teachers represent a crucial target group for professional development, as incremental support can shift their practice from routine-based to more reflective and creative instruction.

Professional development is critical to bridging competence gaps. Structured workshops, mentorship, and peer observation can enhance teachers' metalinguistic awareness, particularly for those in the low-to-middle range. Research shows that collaborative professional learning communities significantly improve teachers' instructional creativity and meta-linguistic knowledge (Hendrickx et al., 2025; Ohayon & Albulescu, 2022). Integration of technology, such as corpus tools and automated feedback systems, can further support teachers in analyzing language patterns and designing interactive learning experiences (Shadiev & Feng, 2024).

Curriculum design should also reflect these competence variations. MA programs can embed analytic tasks, reflective exercises, and morphological problem-solving activities to support teachers' innovative practices (Colomer et al., 2020; Dennehy et al., 2021). Assessments that consider both student outcomes and teaching strategies can incentivize teachers to adopt reflective, metalinguistically informed methods, fostering a culture of continuous improvement

Importantly, teacher competence directly influences student outcomes. High metalinguistic competence is associated with enhanced learner critical thinking, problem-solving, and language analytical skills. Conversely, limited competence may constrain classroom interactions, reduce autonomy, and perpetuate surface-level understanding of Arabic linguistic structures. These insights emphasize the need for sustained institutional support, targeted training, and mentorship programs to nurture innovation while reducing dependence on repetitive instructional routines (Nurbayan et al., 2023; Shalihah et al., 2025; Urio & Mwakabenga, 2025).

In conclusion, the study demonstrates a clear gradient effect of metalinguistic competence on teaching approaches in MA Arabic classrooms. High-competence teachers implement reflective, student-centered, and innovative strategies, while low-competence teachers predominantly use repetitive, rule-bound methods. Middle-competence teachers are pivotal candidates for interventions, where professional development can significantly enhance their ability to translate meta-linguistic knowledge into dynamic classroom practices. The findings advocate for policy and curriculum initiatives that promote reflective, innovation-driven teaching, ensuring that Arabic language instruction not only conveys linguistic knowledge but also cultivates critical and autonomous learners.

Conclusion

This study investigates the level of metalinguistic awareness of Arabic teachers at Madrasah Aliyah in Jombang Regency and its impact on teaching practices. It was found that the majority of teachers had “intermediate” metalinguistic awareness, with scores ranging from 418 to 472. Further analysis showed a significant correlation between teachers' levels of metalinguistic competence (low, intermediate, high) and the teaching approaches they applied. Teachers with high competence tended to adopt innovative, reflective, and student-centered teaching strategies. Conversely, teachers with low competence more often used repetitive and memorization-oriented methods, which limited student engagement and deep understanding.

The pedagogical implications highlight that high metalinguistic awareness facilitates innovation in teaching, while low levels maintain rote-based instruction. Teachers with intermediate competence are an important target for structured professional development to improve the integration of metalinguistic awareness into their teaching practices. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development, such as workshops and learning communities, as well as curriculum innovation that supports analytical and reflective tasks. Ultimately, teachers' metalinguistic competence directly correlates with improvements in students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical language skills. This research affirms that metalinguistic awareness is an important foundation for reflective and adaptive pedagogy in Arabic language teaching, which supports the formation of critical and independent learners.

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