

Scaffolding Arabic Syntax Learning: An Examination of Introductory Nahwu Materials for Novice Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pedagogical structure and scaffolding mechanisms within *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* by Al-Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Baharun, a foundational Arabic syntax textbook widely used in pesantren education in Indonesia. While previous studies on Arabic grammar learning have primarily emphasized external scaffolding through instructional strategies or digital technologies, limited attention has been paid to the internal scaffolding embedded within traditional nahwu textbooks themselves. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the scaffolding framework of Wood, Bruner, and Ross, this qualitative content analysis examines how the text sequentially supports novice learners in mastering Arabic syntax. The findings identify three interrelated scaffolding stages: conceptual, procedural, and integrative, through which syntactic awareness is progressively developed using simplified examples, repetitive sentence patterns, and contextualized explanations. A distinctive pedagogical feature of the book is its early emphasis on phonological recognition (*ḍammah*, *fathah*, and *kasrah*) prior to introducing abstract grammatical terminology, which functions as a cognitive bridge for beginners. The study concludes that *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* exemplifies an effective model of internal scaffolding, demonstrating how traditional Arabic grammar materials can align with contemporary educational psychology to support novice syntax learning in pesantren and similar educational contexts.

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Introduction

Arabic syntax (*nahwu*) forms the structural backbone of Arabic linguistic competence, governing how words interrelate to convey meaning. However, for novice learners especially

in non-Arabic-speaking contexts such as Indonesia *nahwu* often emerges as one of the most challenging subjects in Arabic education (Baharun, 2025). The difficulty lies not only in the abstract nature of syntactic concepts but also in the cognitive overload caused by simultaneous exposure to technical terminology, morphological patterns, and inflectional rules. This pedagogical complexity has long been identified as a bottleneck in Arabic grammar instruction (Mahmudah, 2021; Masnun et al., 2025; Masnun, 2025), prompting educators to seek more structured and accessible approaches.

Beyond its technical function, Arabic syntax (*nahwu*) occupies a pivotal role in shaping learners' initial perceptions of the Arabic language itself. In many Islamic educational traditions, Arabic is widely regarded as the gateway to Islamic, as it provides access to foundational disciplines such as *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh* sciences (Habib et al., 2025; Hanifansyah et al., 2025a; Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024; Mahmudah, 2025; Nur Hanifansyah et al., 2024). Consequently, early encounters with *nahwu* often serve as a formative threshold that determines whether novice learners perceive Arabic as an accessible system or an inherently difficult language. When syntactic instruction is introduced through dense terminology and abstract rule exposition, learners may experience early frustration, reinforcing the belief that Arabic is structurally complex and cognitively demanding. Conversely, a scaffolded and learner-sensitive approach to *nahwu* has the potential to foster early comprehension, confidence, and positive linguistic attitudes, thereby influencing long-term engagement with Arabic learning. This underscores the pedagogical importance of examining how introductory *nahwu* materials mediate not only grammatical understanding but also learners' affective and cognitive orientations toward the Arabic language.

At Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah (Dalwa), the foundational text *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* by Al-Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Baharun has been widely adopted to scaffold beginners' understanding of syntax (Baharun et al., 2025). Designed specifically for novices, the book presents 41 concise lessons beginning with the identification of parts of speech (*ism*, *fi'il*, *harf*) and gradually progressing toward more abstract constructs such as *mubtada'–khabar*, *maf'ul bih*, *mudhaf–mudhaf ilaih*, and *naibul fa'il*. Its sequential organization, simplification of examples, and consistent patterning of rules represent an implicit form of pedagogical scaffolding that aligns with Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) and Wood, Bruner, and Ross's scaffolding model where instructional support is gradually reduced as learners gain autonomy (Alharbi, 2022; Bruner, 1974; Gehlot, 2021; Klempe, 2025).

Recent studies have explored diverse applications of scaffolding and technological innovation in Arabic grammar instruction, reflecting a global shift toward more structured and learner-centered pedagogy. Abdul Hamid et al. (2024) demonstrated that interactive

infographic modules enhanced comprehension and motivation in Arabic grammar learning, offering visual scaffolds that simplified complex syntactic concepts. Similarly, Sa'Idah et al. (2024) and Ahmed (2025) confirmed the effectiveness of AI-based systems such as *Tashkeel* in improving grammatical understanding and learner autonomy through adaptive feedback. Beyond digital scaffolding, Such (2021) highlighted the power of linguistic and directional scaffolding in supporting L2 learners' collaborative writing, while Majlesi (2014) emphasized *embodied scaffolding* the integration of gesture, gaze, and textual cues in constructing grammatical awareness. Moeen et al. (2019) further compared implicit and explicit scaffolding in grammar teaching, finding that implicit approaches improved fluency whereas explicit ones strengthened accuracy, revealing the dual function of scaffolding in both intuitive and analytical language development.

In the context of Arabic language pedagogy, Majadly and Geva-Kleinberger (2020) identified significant deficiencies in grammar curricula across Middle Eastern countries, noting their lack of developmental sequencing and functional integration. Their findings reinforce the pedagogical necessity of a stepwise, scaffolded approach. Within the Indonesian pesantren system, Hanani et al. (2024) demonstrated how *Kitab al-Amtsilah at-Tashrifiiyyah* facilitates morphological learning through an eclectic blend of traditional memorization and modern interactive strategies providing evidence that classical texts, when scaffolded methodically, can sustain contemporary educational relevance. Together, these studies affirm that scaffolding whether visual, digital, embodied, or textual serves as a universal pedagogical principle enabling learners to progress from guided recognition to independent mastery.

Despite these advances, few studies have examined how traditional Arabic grammar textbooks themselves embody internal scaffolding structures that guide novice learners from concrete phonological recognition to abstract syntactic analysis. Existing research largely focuses on external technological or instructional scaffolds rather than the textual architecture of grammar learning materials. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian pesantren context, where Arabic grammar instruction relies heavily on classical textbooks as the primary mediating tools between teachers and learners. In many pesantren, these texts are not merely supplementary resources but function as the core pedagogical framework shaping how nahwu is introduced, sequenced, and internalized by novice students. Consequently, the internal instructional logic of pesantren-based nahwu textbooks remains underexplored despite their central role in Arabic syntax acquisition

Two central research questions guide the inquiry: How does the sequencing of syntactic topics in *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* function as a scaffold for beginners' comprehension of Arabic syntax? What pedagogical principles underlie the simplification and progression of *nahwu* concepts in the text?

The scope of this study is limited to the pedagogical and structural aspects of the textbook rather than linguistic comparison with other grammar sources. It focuses on the text's internal logic, gradation, and its alignment with contemporary scaffolding and cognitive learning theories. By examining the book as a model of applied scaffolding in Arabic syntax instruction, this study aims to contribute to both theoretical and practical discussions in Arabic pedagogy—highlighting how classical linguistic precision can harmonize with modern educational psychology to support novice learners in pesantren-based language education.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design using content analysis to examine the pedagogical structure and scaffolding mechanisms within *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* by Al-Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Baharun. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Scaffolding Framework of Wood, Bruner, and Ross (Fukada, 2024), the research assumes that a well-structured grammar textbook can function as an instructional scaffold that mediates learners' cognitive development. The analysis focuses on how the sequencing of syntactic topics in the book facilitates step-by-step understanding among beginner students of Arabic syntax.

A qualitative approach was selected because the primary aim of this study is not to measure learning outcomes or instructional effectiveness, but to interpret the internal pedagogical logic embedded within a grammar textbook. Quantitative or mixed-methods designs would be more appropriate for examining learners' performance gains or comparative instructional effects, which fall beyond the scope of this research. Instead, this study seeks to uncover how scaffolding is conceptually and procedurally constructed within the textual organization of the material itself, making qualitative inquiry methodologically appropriate.

Content analysis was operationalized through a thematic–conceptual framework, focusing on how grammatical topics are sequenced, simplified, and progressively integrated across the text. Each section of *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* was coded according to its dominant scaffolding function (conceptual introduction, procedural reinforcement, or integrative application), as well as its cognitive orientation (phonological recognition, pattern repetition, or abstract rule formation). This analytical process allowed for a systematic interpretation of how internal scaffolding mechanisms are embedded within the textbook's structure and presentation.

The unit of analysis is the text itself, particularly its 41 concise sections that progress from foundational elements *ism*, *fi'il*, and *harf* to more complex syntactic structures such as *mubtada' khabar*, *maf'ul bih*, *naibul fa'il*, and *tamyiz*. The data are secondary and textual,

drawn entirely from the aforementioned book and supported by pedagogical and psycholinguistic literature related to scaffolding, grammar teaching, and cognitive load management. No human participants were involved, as the focus rests solely on textual content and instructional sequencing.

Data collection followed the stages of document analysis as described by Bowen (2022), including identification, organization, coding, and interpretation. Each section was coded according to its pedagogical function ranging from conceptual introduction and rule reinforcement to syntactic integration. The analysis employed Miles and Huberman's (Asipi et al., 2022) qualitative framework involving data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing to reveal how the material embodies scaffolding principles such as gradual release of responsibility, simplification of input, and contextual reinforcement. In this study, data condensation was performed by systematically reducing each textbook section into analytically relevant units, focusing on the sequence of grammatical topics, types of examples used, and the progression from concrete forms to abstract rules. Data displays were constructed in the form of analytic matrices that mapped chapters against scaffolding functions (conceptual, procedural, and integrative) and cognitive orientation (phonological recognition, pattern repetition, or rule abstraction). Coding examples included the identification of early lessons emphasizing vowel recognition prior to grammatical terminology, which were interpreted as conceptual scaffolding. These matrices enabled cross-section comparison and informed thematic conclusions regarding internal scaffolding patterns embedded within the textbook.

The contextual setting for this study is Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah (Dalwa) in Pasuruan, Indonesia, where the textbook serves as a core foundation for Arabic syntax instruction (Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024). The selection of Dalwa is justified by its role as both the author's institution and a representative site for traditional-yet-structured Arabic pedagogy. This method was chosen to uncover the implicit instructional logic within the text how it systematically supports learners' syntactic comprehension through sequential organization and graded complexity thus providing insight into how *nahwu* can be effectively scaffolded in modern Arabic education.

Result and Discussion

Scaffolding Stages in the Structure of *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu*

In pesantren-based Arabic education, early mastery of *nahwu* is widely regarded as a gateway to broader Islamic and linguistic sciences (Hanifansyah et al., 2025b), because syntactic awareness underpins text comprehension, vocabulary development, and accurate oral production (Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024; Baharun, 2025; Mahmudah, 2021). Within this

tradition, *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* is positioned as a primer that enables novices to transition from recognition of surface forms to principled syntactic reasoning in a staged manner.

The analysis reveals that *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* is systematically structured across three scaffolding stages: conceptual scaffolding, procedural scaffolding, and integrative scaffolding. Each stage progressively builds learners' syntactic awareness from basic recognition of word classes toward the application of complex grammatical rules in contextualized expressions.

At the conceptual level, the initial chapters (1–7) introduce foundational classifications such as *ism*, *fi'il*, and *harf*, followed by distinctions like *ma'rifah–nakirah* and *mudzakkar–mu'annats*. These topics serve as *entry-level scaffolds* designed to activate learners' prior linguistic knowledge. The explanations use simple Arabic examples (e.g., “الولد، الكتاب، السيارة”) paired with Indonesian glosses, reducing cognitive load and facilitating form–meaning mapping. This stage corresponds with Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*, in which external mediation enables learners to grasp abstract grammatical concepts through concrete examples.

The procedural scaffolding stage (chapters 8–20) transitions into the functional and relational components of syntax—*fa'il*, *maf'ul bih*, *mubtada'–khabar*, and *mudhaf–mudhaf ilaih*. Each rule is introduced with repetitive syntactic patterns (e.g., جاء زيدٌ، رأيتُ زيداً، مررتُ بزيدٍ), allowing learners to internalize morphological indicators of *i'rab* through visual analogy rather than abstract theory. This structured repetition reflects what Bruner terms the *spiral curriculum* (Bruner, 1992), wherein prior knowledge is revisited with increasing complexity. Learners progressively identify subject–predicate relations, nominal agreement, and inflectional endings through pattern recognition rather than memorization.

Finally, the integrative scaffolding phase (chapters 21–41) focuses on syntactic application and rule synthesis covering *naibul fa'il*, *hal*, *tamyiz*, *taukid*, and *mustatsna*. These sections merge previous concepts into interconnected grammatical reasoning. The author introduces contextualized sentences demonstrating how rules co-occur (e.g., جاء زيدٌ مجتهداً، ما جاء إلا زيدٌ), guiding students to synthesize multiple grammatical cues simultaneously. The gradual shift from isolated explanation to integrated example fulfills the scaffolding principle of *fading*—the teacher's or text's assistance decreases as learner autonomy strengthens (Wood et al., 1976).

A qualitative interview with a senior Arabic instructor at Dalwa, conducted to triangulate textual analysis, supports this interpretation:

“We never introduce nahwu rules in random order. Habib Hasan designed the book so that every chapter unlocks the next one. When students finish fa‘il and maf‘ul, they already ‘feel’ the pattern of Arabic sentences before even touching mubtada’ khabar. It’s like climbing stairs the rules are not memorized, they are built.”

This reflection underscores the author’s pedagogical intent: the text serves not only as reference material but as a *guided learning trajectory*, aligning with the principles of *scaffolded instruction*.

Foundational Reinforcement and Cognitive Bridging

One of the most distinctive scaffolding strategies found in Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu is its progressive avoidance of technical abstraction in the early stages. Unlike most nahwu primers that immediately introduce the terminologies raf‘, naṣb, and jar (or khafḍ), Al-Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Baharun deliberately begins with practical phonological and visual recognition namely, the familiarization of ḍammah, faṭḥah, and kasrah as living markers of grammatical relationships. This pedagogical decision serves as both a foundation-building phase and a cognitive bridge for learners who are encountering Arabic syntax for the first time.

By engaging students with tangible vowel patterns before abstract grammatical nomenclature, the text ensures that conceptual understanding grows from perceptual familiarity. Learners are trained to associate endings with syntactic meaning such as “الولدُ جاءَ”, “رَأَيْتُ الولدَ”, and “مررتُ بالولدِ” long before they are introduced to the technical terms for nominative, accusative, and genitive cases. This mirrors Bruner’s (1983) concept of enactive representation, where knowledge begins through concrete sensory experience before transitioning to symbolic abstraction. In other words, the book first cultivates pattern awareness and only later translates those patterns into formal nahwu terminology.

This approach creates a “thinking bridge” (jembatan berpikir) between sound and syntax, allowing learners to intuitively grasp linguistic structure before being burdened by technical jargon. When the book later introduces raf‘, naṣb, and jar, students already possess an internalized schema for recognizing functional roles through ḍammah, faṭḥah, and kasrah. This sequencing minimizes anxiety and supports cognitive load management (Sweller, 2022), enabling learners to transition smoothly from concrete recognition to abstract grammatical reasoning. Hence, the text exemplifies a deeply humanized form of scaffolding anchoring abstract syntax in the learner’s auditory and visual experience of language.

Cognitive and Pedagogical Implications

The results indicate that the text’s sequential logic effectively supports cognitive load reduction (Sweller, 2022) by breaking down complex syntactic structures into manageable learning units. Each concept is contextualized through concrete examples before general rules are abstracted, enabling what Mayer (Mayer, 2014; Mayer & Moreno, 1998, 2003) calls *dual-*

channel processing balancing verbal and visual linguistic input. Moreover, the consistent triplet structure of examples (*fa'il*, *maf'ul bih*, *majrur*) mirrors procedural memory formation, encouraging pattern-based automatization rather than rote recall.

In this sense, *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* differs from traditional texts like *Ajurrumiyyah* or *Qawa'id al-I'rab*, which often present rules deductively and abstractly. The Dalwa primer adopts an inductive and incremental method, beginning with observation of language use before presenting grammatical terminology. This method aligns with contemporary constructivist models (Ellis, 2019; Spada et al., 2015), which emphasize that grammar acquisition emerges from exposure, hypothesis testing, and feedback rather than memorization alone.

More specifically, this contrast can be observed at the level of topic sequencing, terminological density, and exemplification strategies. In *Ajurrumiyyah*, abstract grammatical categories such as *i'rab*, *raf'*, *na'ib*, and *jar* are introduced at an early stage through concise definitional statements, often with limited contextualized examples. By contrast, *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* delays formal terminological exposition and begins with observable linguistic patterns, such as vowel endings and recurring sentence structures, before naming grammatical functions. In comparable early chapters on nominal sentences, the Dalwa primer employs multiple parallel examples with minimal terminology, whereas *Ajurrumiyyah* prioritizes rule articulation over pattern repetition. This difference reflects not merely a stylistic variation, but a distinct pedagogical logic one that foregrounds inductive pattern recognition and gradual abstraction as a form of internal scaffolding for novice learners.

The findings corroborate earlier research on structured grammar learning but contribute a unique insight into how traditional pesantren materials embody modern scaffolding theory. Baharun (2025) identified that explicit sequencing in Arabic grammar textbooks improves rule retention among beginners, yet their focus remained limited to cognitive efficiency rather than pedagogical design. Likewise, Solehudin and Hanifansyah (2024) demonstrated that localized materials enhance *nahwu* comprehension when supported by contextual learning, but did not analyze internal textual scaffolding.

This study extends those discussions by illustrating that *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* inherently applies scaffolding principles through its internal structure an innovation in traditional Arabic pedagogy that predates the formal articulation of scaffolding theory. It demonstrates that pedagogical intuitions rooted in pesantren culture align with modern educational psychology, where learning support is adaptive and progressively withdrawn.

The text thus bridges classical linguistic precision with modern learning theory, positioning Dalwa's approach as a model of integrative pedagogy where syntactic mastery is

cultivated through simplicity, sequencing, and semantic clarity. This synthesis reaffirms that effective grammar instruction, even in traditional Islamic education, can reflect cognitive and constructivist sophistication when guided by coherent scaffolding design.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Pengantar Belajar Ilmu Nahwu* by Al-Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Baharun exemplifies an effective scaffolding-based approach to Arabic syntax instruction for novice learners. Through systematic sequencing from the introduction of word categories (ism, fi'il, harf) to the integration of complex syntactic relations (mubtada'–khabar, maf'ul bih, tamyiz, hal) the book gradually supports learners' cognitive development and grammatical awareness. Its structure reflects the three stages of scaffolding: conceptual, procedural, and integrative, each designed to build autonomy and reduce learning load through repetition, pattern recognition, and contextual reinforcement. The findings confirm that even within traditional pesantren frameworks, the implicit pedagogical logic of classical texts can align with modern educational theories such as Vygotsky's ZPD and Bruner's spiral curriculum, emphasizing learning as a process of guided internalization rather than memorization.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges its limitation in scope, focusing solely on textual content without classroom observation or empirical measurement of learning outcomes. Future research could extend this analysis through experimental or ethnographic studies that examine how students interact with the material and how scaffolding principles translate into real classroom dynamics. Practically, this study suggests that the Dalwa model of syntax instruction can serve as a prototype for curriculum design that harmonizes traditional grammar rigor with cognitive accessibility. Educators may adopt similar scaffolding strategies starting from tangible linguistic examples and progressively abstracting toward syntactic generalization to enhance the teaching of nahwu in pesantren, schools, and universities alike.

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