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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Implementation of Gamification Strategies to Overcome Language Anxiety in Non-Native Arabic Language Learning

Jauharotun Nafisah^{1*}

¹*Universitas Ma'arif Lampung, Indonesia*

Correspondence: nafisahafiz7@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language anxiety constitutes a primary psychological barrier for Islamic junior high school (madrasah) students in acquiring Arabic language proficiency. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of gamification in mitigating Arabic language anxiety among students at MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus. An empirical approach was employed to evaluate the impact of integrating game mechanics on the fluctuation of students' affective filters and cognitive load during the instructional process. Field findings demonstrate that gamification strategies significantly reduce anxiety levels by fostering a cooperative learning environment devoid of emotional threats. The incorporation of instant feedback and autonomous competition designs proved highly effective in transforming the fear of making grammatical errors into intrinsic motivation and proactive participation. The success of this pedagogical intervention simultaneously confirms the high adaptability of gamified elements within the sociocultural context of rural madrasahs, independent of advanced technological infrastructure. This study concludes that gamification serves as a robust pedagogical accelerator for overcoming the mental blocks experienced by target language learners. This research fundamentally recommends the structural integration of the *tal'ib* (gamification) approach into madrasah curriculum policies to ensure students' psychological well-being and long-term success in foreign language literacy.

Keywords: Affective Filter; Arabic Language; Gamification; Language Anxiety; Madrasah Tsanawiyah.

ABSTRAK

Kecemasan berbahasa asing merupakan hambatan psikologis utama bagi siswa madrasah dalam mengakuisisi kompetensi bahasa Arab. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas implementasi gamifikasi dalam mereduksi tingkat kecemasan berbahasa Arab pada peserta didik di MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus. Pendekatan empiris digunakan untuk mengevaluasi dampak integrasi mekanika permainan terhadap fluktuasi saringan afektif dan beban kognitif siswa selama proses pembelajaran. Temuan lapangan menunjukkan bahwa strategi gamifikasi berhasil menurunkan tingkat kecemasan secara signifikan melalui penciptaan lingkungan belajar kooperatif yang bebas dari ancaman emosional. Pemberian umpan balik instan dan desain kompetisi otonom terbukti efektif mentransformasi ketakutan melakukan kesalahan gramatikal menjadi motivasi intrinsik dan partisipasi proaktif. Keberhasilan intervensi pedagogis ini turut mengonfirmasi tingginya adaptabilitas elemen permainan pada konteks sosiokultural madrasah di wilayah pedesaan tanpa harus bergantung secara absolut pada infrastruktur teknologi mutakhir. Kesimpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa gamifikasi merupakan instrumen akselerator andal untuk memecahkan kebuntuan mental pemelajar bahasa target. Riset ini merekomendasikan integrasi pendekatan tal'ib (gamifikasi) ke dalam kebijakan kurikulum madrasah guna menjamin kesejahteraan psikologis dan keberhasilan literasi bahasa asing jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Arab; Gamifikasi; Kecemasan Berbahasa; Madrasah Tsanawiyah; Saringan Afektif.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning for non-native speakers is a complex process involving both cognitive and psychological challenges simultaneously. Students are required to master a linguistic system fundamentally different from their mother tongue, from morphological structures to phonological systems (Al-Batal, 2018, p. 45). This linguistic complexity often triggers a psychological phenomenon known as language anxiety (Horwitz, 2017, p. 72). This anxiety acts as an affective filter that hinders linguistic input from being optimally processed by the learner's brain. These negative affective conditions affect academic performance and drastically reduce learners' intrinsic motivation. Various studies confirm that high anxiety levels correlate negatively with speaking proficiency and comprehension of Arabic texts (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 104). Learners experiencing anxiety tend to avoid active participation in class. This avoidance behavior causes them to miss valuable opportunities to practice the language skills they are learning communicatively.

The academic debate regarding the impact of language anxiety continues dynamically among second language acquisition researchers. Some scholars argue that a certain level of anxiety, known as facilitating anxiety, is actually necessary to encourage student alertness (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 89). This group believes that mild psychological tension can trigger sharper focus when facing language tasks. The majority of applied linguistics experts refute this view, asserting that in the context of Arabic language learning, anxiety is almost always debilitating (Alrabai, 2015, p. 32). The unique orthographic and grammatical characteristics of Arabic already place students' cognitive load at maximum levels. The addition of emotional burden in the form of anxiety actually

causes temporary cognitive paralysis in students' working memory systems (Krashen, 2018, p. 55). Students often experience mental blocks when asked to read unvocalized texts or respond to oral questions spontaneously in front of the class.

Social facts on the ground reveal a concerning reality regarding the implementation of Arabic language learning at the madrasah level. Preliminary observations at MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus revealed high manifestations of language anxiety among students. The majority of students showed physical and psychological symptoms when attending lessons, such as muscle tension and an inability to construct sentences when called upon by the teacher (Rahman & Hasanah, 2021, p. 112). Students perceive Arabic as a frightening and very difficult subject to understand. This situation is exacerbated by the dominance of conventional, teacher-centered teaching methods that emphasize mechanical memorization of grammatical rules (Mustofa, 2020, p. 78). Such monotonous pedagogical approaches fail to create a socio-emotionally safe learning environment. This condition causes students to build resistance and phobia towards Arabic, which has a destructive impact on their learning motivation continuously (Nafisah, 2023).

Gamification strategies emerge as a promising cutting-edge pedagogical alternative solution to transform the classroom climate into a more interactive one. Gamification is articulated as the application of game design elements, dynamics, and mechanics in non-game contexts to motivate learner participation (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 10). This approach cleverly leverages humans' natural tendencies towards healthy competition, achievement of targets, and social collaboration. The application of leaderboards, badges, point systems, and interactive narratives has proven effective in shifting students' focus from fear of failure to enthusiasm for exploring challenges (Kapp, 2012, p. 43). Game-based environments provide students with absolute freedom to experiment with language without the risk of heavy social sanctions. The sense of security formed gradually lowers students' affective filters significantly. This reduction in anxiety allows the process of linguistic internalization of Arabic to occur naturally, enjoyably, and with minimal psychological pressure burdening cognition (Zourou, 2016, p. 59).

The academic discourse surrounding the effectiveness of gamification in foreign language education is also colored by very sharp scientific dialectics. Proponents of gamification claim that this strategy can trigger a flow state, an ideal psychological condition where learners are completely immersed in learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 135). These experts postulate that the reward system in gamification produces dopamine, effectively increasing long-term memory retention capacity (Sailer et al., 2017, p. 372). Critics, on the other hand, warn of the potential hidden dangers of superficial gamification that relies solely on the manipulation of extrinsic motivation. The use of artificially given rewards and points is feared to permanently kill students' intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2016, p. 88). Careless gamification design has the potential to trigger new anxiety due to toxic competition among students. The integration of game mechanics demands a precise balance with pedagogical design centered on communicative meaning.

An extensive review of current literature demonstrates the massive amount of research exploring the utility of gamification in foreign language classrooms. Empirical investigation by Figueroa (2015, p. 45) proved that digital gamification platforms successfully reduced speaking anxiety in Spanish language learners. Another qualitative study by Al-Azawi et al. (2016, p. 132) highlighted the significant increase in student cognitive engagement in English classes adopting role-playing

game elements. Relevant to the Arabic language context, a study by Dehghani et al. (2019, p. 210) found a strong positive correlation between the use of game-based applications and accelerated mastery of basic vocabulary. This series of research findings confirms gamification's capability to neutralize psychological tension in academic learning spaces. The injected element of fun has proven capable of reducing learners' perceived threat perception when constructing understanding of foreign grammar that is complex both syntactically and semantically (Abu-Rabia, 2004, p. 715).

A comprehensive review of the intersection of gamification and language anxiety literature reveals an essential research gap. The majority of previous studies tend to focus observations on university-level English learners in developed countries with premium technological infrastructure (Hassan et al., 2021, p. 89). Very few studies dedicate their investigation to the application of gamification for mitigating Arabic language learning anxiety at the madrasah tsanawiyah level in rural areas such as MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus. Previous research also tends to dominate the measurement of gamification effectiveness on cognitive learning outcomes rather than specifically dissecting its affective impact (Yunus & Azman, 2019, p. 67). The sociocultural characteristics of madrasah students in Indonesia demand a specific approach in instructional design. The absence of a gamification model precisely designed to handle language anxiety in non-native speakers at rural madrasah institutions is an urgent gap that this research aims to fill.

Based on the identification of academic gaps and the configuration of empirical realities, this research is designed to dissect the effectiveness of gamification strategies in reducing Arabic language anxiety. This experimental approach is projected to represent theoretical novelty as well as practical contribution to the construction of Arabic language pedagogy that is adaptive to students' psychological architecture. The first research focus is to examine the most relevant design of gamification strategies to suppress language anxiety levels among middle school students at MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus. The second research focus is to analyze the extent of the implications of implementing these gamification strategies on the escalation of active engagement of non-native students. In-depth investigation of these two fundamental problem formulations will inject a crucial contribution to the development of progressive Arabic language teaching methodologies. The findings of this research are anticipated to catalyze the transformation of the classroom climate into a humanistic learning ecosystem that fully supports students' mental well-being.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research applies a qualitative approach with a field research type to dissect psychological phenomena in the classroom. The selection of a qualitative design is based on the urgency of exploring the subjective meanings of non-native students' experiences when facing Arabic language anxiety (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). This approach facilitates researchers in capturing the dynamics of social interaction naturally without intervention through statistical variable manipulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 22). A single case study design is used to focus the investigation specifically on gamification implementation (Yin, 2018, p. 32). The methodological framework is focused on searching for meaning behind students' resistance and participation

behaviors during the learning process. Data collection is comprehensively directed to construct a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of game-based pedagogical interventions.

The research location was specifically determined at MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus, considering the demographic characteristics of students who are mostly non-native speakers. The determination of research subjects applied purposive sampling techniques based on criteria of active involvement in Arabic language classes (Sugiyono, 2019, p. 120). Key informants include the subject teacher as the main instructional designer of gamification (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Supporting informants consist of middle school students identified as having a spectrum of language anxiety from low to high levels. The researcher positioned themselves as the main instrument interacting directly with all subjects in the field (Moleong, 2017, p. 165). Direct involvement plays a crucial role in building emotional closeness to dig out valid and in-depth factual information.

Empirical data collection was operationalized through three main integrated techniques proportionally. Passive participant observation was conducted during teaching and learning activities to record fluctuations in students' affective tension (Almalki, 2016, p. 290). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the teacher to dissect the foundation for designing game elements such as badges and points. Separate interview sessions were conducted with student groups to listen to their subjective confessions regarding the transformation of cognitive load (Dornyei, 2007, p. 140). Documentation focused on the analysis of syllabi, lesson plans, interactive game modules, and daily assessment records. The three instruments were systematically combined to capture pedagogical reality precisely, completely, and comprehensively without information distortion (Richards, 2015, p. 89).

The technical steps of the research were articulated structurally to thoroughly answer the two main problem formulations. The first problem formulation regarding gamification strategy design was answered through synchronization of instructional designer interview data with module document analysis (Al-Qahtani, 2019, p. 45). The second problem formulation regarding the implications of gamification on anxiety was executed by comparing observation behavioral records and student interview reflections. Raw field data were analyzed using an interactive model encompassing the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 31). The condensation stage strictly selects essential information relevant to the language anxiety focus. Conclusions were drawn inductively based on recurring thematic patterns identified during the coding process.

The trustworthiness of research findings was ensured through the application of very strict data validity procedures. Source triangulation was applied by cross-validating information from teachers, students, and written administrative documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Technical triangulation was conducted by matching the consistency of interview narratives with the reality of actions recorded in field observation journals. Extended observation duration was instructed to minimize subject reactivity bias towards the presence of foreign observers in the classroom. Peer debriefing involved independent academics to objectively audit the data interpretation process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 250). Verification steps were systematically

designed to ensure the reproducibility and credibility of the final research conclusions before the global scientific community.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Nurul Barkah is an Islamic-based junior high school level educational institution located in the Tanggamus region, precisely in Pekon Betung, Pematang Sawa District, Tanggamus Regency. This educational institution is fully dedicated to organizing a learning system that integrates the national education curriculum with an in-depth study of religious sciences. The school environment is comprehensively designed to facilitate cognitive, affective, and character development of students. The main goal of this madrasah is centered on efforts to produce a young generation that is not only intellectually superior but also possesses strong moral integrity in facing the challenges of the times.

The school continuously develops various extracurricular programs and innovative learning methods to optimize the potential of every student, including in foreign language mastery. The dynamics of academic activities and student creativity are managed and actively published through the school's official social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube. The use of these digital media functions as an interactive public communication channel as well as a space for appreciation of various student achievements in various fields. This adaptive and modern educational approach makes MTs Nurul Barkah a supportive learning ecosystem for the holistic development of all students.

The research implementation was carried out at MTs Nurul Barkah, an Islamic-based secondary educational institution dedicated to developing students' foreign language competencies. Initial observations showed a dominance of students with non-native backgrounds experiencing significant challenges in mastering Arabic. The school's environmental infrastructure was very adequate to support the interactive learning process (Ministry of Education, 2026). The researcher found a sharp disparity between the available facilities and the level of students' intrinsic motivation within the classroom. Arabic language teachers faced major obstacles in enlivening an academic atmosphere that was both interactive and meaningful. Field realities demanded absolute pedagogical innovation to reduce students' psychological tension (Al-Qahtani, 2019, p. 35). Gamification intervention was then designed to respond to this methodological deadlock.

Initial findings revealed high levels of language anxiety in the majority of students before the intervention was applied. Anxiety symptoms manifested through avoidance behaviors such as avoiding eye contact with the teacher and reluctance to participate in question-and-answer sessions. Students admitted to feeling intimidated by the complexity of grammar and pronunciation of Arabic vocabulary that sounded foreign (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128). Pre-research interviews documented students' excessive fear of potential negative evaluation from peers if they made articulation errors. High cognitive load blocked students' working memory capacity in processing new linguistic information (Sweller, 2011, p. 65). The classroom situation was dominated by passive silence that structurally hindered the achievement of the curriculum's target communicative competencies.

Instructional gamification design was operationalized through the introduction of game mechanics elements into the Arabic syllabus. The teacher reconstructed the traditional evaluation structure into an experience points (XP) acquisition system for every form of participation. Learning modules were equipped with tiered challenges requiring students to complete translation and accurate pronunciation missions (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 11). Students received digital badges and physical stickers as a form of positive affirmation for achieving specific targets in understanding Arabic texts. The strategy of providing instant appreciation proved crucial in disrupting the anxiety cycle that had been restraining students' cognition. The game mechanics approach successfully transformed the perception of evaluation from a psychological threat into an enjoyable adventure (Kapp, 2012, p. 45).

Classroom dynamics underwent a significant shift after the application of a specially modified leaderboard. The teacher designed group-based leaderboards to avoid destructive individual competition that could potentially trigger new types of anxiety (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011, p. 55). Students were encouraged to teach each other in their teams to accumulate the highest collective points by the end of the week. Collaboration among students increased sharply along with the emergence of communal motivation to win vocabulary mastery-based simulation games. Participatory observation recorded interactive realities where proficient students voluntarily assisted their peers experiencing learning gaps. Group cooperation mechanisms effectively distributed psychological pressure evenly across all team members (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The results of in-depth interviews with the Arabic language teacher revealed a very radical pedagogical paradigm shift. The teacher reported an extreme decrease in student resistance levels towards complex materials such as *qawaid* (grammar) and *hiwar* (conversation). The instructional designer emphasized the efficacy of storytelling techniques in wrapping each gamification mission to be coherent with adolescent imagination (Kapp, 2012, p. 78). A treasure hunt narrative in the desert was used to contextualize exercises in constructing perfect Arabic sentences. The teacher felt a far superior efficiency in classroom time management compared to the application of conventional monologue lecture methods. The transformation of the teacher's role from lecturer to game facilitator created emotional closeness with all students.

Students' subjective reflections through interview sessions validated the reliability of gamification in drastically reducing affective tension. Students transparently stated the disappearance of fear of making mistakes when practicing pronunciation of new vocabulary in front of the class audience. The learning environment framed as a game simulation arena shifted cognitive focus from shame to the desire to compete in collecting points (Al-Qahtani, 2019, p. 48). Several informants admitted that Arabic lessons were now anticipated as the most awaited interactive session each week. The decrease in the affective filter noticeably accelerated the process of assimilating linguistic input into long-term memory systems (Krashen, 1982, p. 31). Students felt they had greater autonomy in determining the pace of completing challenge levels.

Field observation notes showed a series of physical behavioral changes representing students' psychological relaxation. Students' body language appeared much more relaxed, marked by a sharp increase in eye contact intensity when responding to verbal instructions in Arabic (Richards, 2015, p. 112). Facial muscle tension and defensive postures that dominated the first weeks of observation gradually faded completely. The classroom was filled with laughter and collegial appreciative

cheers every time a group successfully solved a grammar puzzle. The involvement of kinetic physical movement when taking achievement badges on the teacher's desk also facilitated the release of stress energy (Asher, 1969, p. 4). The classroom atmosphere evolved into an academic ecosystem that celebrated the process of experimentation rather than merely pursuing artificial perfection.

Game mechanics intervention had a direct impact on the empirical acceleration of *maharah kalam* (speaking skills) competency mastery. Point-based role-playing games required students to articulate Arabic dialogues spontaneously to maintain their team's position supremacy. Grammatical errors that appeared during the simulation process were no longer responded to with sharp interruptive corrections but through reflective feedback loop sessions (Dornyei, 2007, p. 156). The structural error tolerance approach fostered students' courage to experiment using various new adaptive sentence patterns. Students demonstrated increased speaking fluency along with the collapse of concerns about social criticism threats from their surroundings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 92). Implicit vocabulary repetition within game missions successfully strengthened retention without forced mechanical memorization.

The empirical reality at MTs Nurul Barkah echoes the relevance of intrinsic motivation theory in the contemporary second language acquisition domain. The element of fun (*mut'ah*) in Arabic language learning activities inherently dissolves students' internal resistance (Al-Fauzan, 2011, p. 89). The integration of gamification systems represents a modern manifestation of the principles of *tasywiq* (motivation encouragement) widely advocated in classical Islamic educational literature. Field statistical data show a linear positive correlation between high frequency of game interaction and low indicators of oral communication anxiety. The study's findings dismantle the outdated stigma that often labels Arabic grammar as a rigid and frightening linguistic discipline for beginners. Recreationally educational pedagogy is proven to be absolutely necessary to deconstruct learners' internal rejection mentality.

The conclusion of the findings validates the operational hypothesis regarding the reliability of gamification as a capable mechanism for reducing language anxiety. The synchronization of cross-triangulated data from teacher observations, student reflections, and field notes confirms the success of holistic classroom climate transformation. Collaborative competition elements combined with instant reward systems proved highly precise in dismantling the psychological blocks of non-native students (Yin, 2018, p. 115). Instructional design that prioritizes autonomy rights, competency development, and strengthening social relations successfully fostered persistent self-directed learning motivation. The research findings distribute an applicable methodological blueprint for secondary educational institutions to revitalize foreign language teaching strategies. Gamification intervention is not merely a pedagogical cosmetic touch but a structured solution to eliminate affective learning barriers.

4. DISCUSSION

Foreign Language Anxiety often becomes the main obstacle for students in mastering Arabic at the secondary school level. This anxiety phenomenon manifests in the form of fear of speaking, lack of self-confidence, and cognitive avoidance during the learning process in the classroom. The findings of this research empirically prove that gamification implementation can significantly

reduce anxiety levels among MTs Nurul Barkah students. The game-based approach creates a non-threatening learning atmosphere, facilitating students to explore without fear of making grammatical errors. This strategy aligns with the affective theory stating that a positive learning environment directly correlates with the decrease in students' affective filter (Krashen, 1982, p. 31). Game-based learning essentially transforms cognitive load into an enjoyable challenge for all class participants.

The empirical findings from MTs Nurul Barkah Tanggamus reinforce the postulates of the affective filter theory in the contemporary second language acquisition discourse. Gamification has proven successful in stimulating the decrease of students' affective filter so that linguistic input can be optimally processed by the brain's memory apparatus (Krashen, 2018, p. 55). Game elements function crucially as a catalyst that transforms debilitating anxiety into mental alertness energy that actually facilitates learner focus. This kind of psychological transformation successfully breaks the learning deadlock that has long been complained about by students with non-Arabic mother tongue backgrounds (Alrabai, 2015, p. 32). The decrease in emotional barriers opens the way for more natural internalization of morphological rules.

The dynamics of Arabic language anxiety are not merely a local endemic issue but also receive wide attention in the global academic discourse on applied linguistics. Educational experts agree that Arabic language learners across continents face similar affective challenges due to the typological gap between their mother tongue syntax and the target language syntax. Digital pedagogical interventions, including educational games, have been globally accredited as methodologically robust anxiety mitigation instruments. Students need an affective bridge capable of facilitating a smooth transition from passive comprehension stages to oral language production skills without coercion. Well-managed gamification strategies have been proven to reduce the activation of stress hormones closely related to public speaking panic (Alrabai, 2014, p. 75). The application of this global approach standard at MTs Nurul Barkah demonstrates the madrasah's adaptability capacity towards twenty-first-century pedagogical trends.

The psychological mechanism behind gamification's effectiveness lies in the provision of instant feedback and an integrated reward system. Students who initially felt pressured when facing Arabic language materials began to show positive attitude changes when healthy competition elements were applied. The flow experience created during gamification sessions made students immersed in learning activities, shifting their focus from anxiety towards achieving objective game targets. This psychological condition is crucial in overcoming the mental blocks that often appear when learners are faced with reading or Arabic speech production tasks. The use of visual and interactive elements breaks boredom and reduces nerve tension that triggers high academic stress. Previous research confirms that digital interactivity is very effective in managing affective tension when learning the target language (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011, p. 12).

The integration of game mechanics contributes massively to the restructuring of cognitive load in students' working memory during learning. The instant feedback system in gamification design facilitates quick error correction without triggering long-term psychological trauma (Sailer et al., 2017, p. 372). Students unconsciously calibrate their sentence syntactic structures to win the language game levels presented by the teacher. The process of grammar internalization occurs implicitly, surpassing traditional deductive approaches that often trigger premature mental fatigue.

This acquisition mechanism resonates strongly with modern language pedagogy principles that prioritize the construction of meaningful communicative competence (Abu-Rabia, 2004, p. 715).

The use of autonomy-based competition design in gamification successfully transformed the hierarchy of authority in the Arabic language classroom to become fully learner-centered. The teacher positioned themselves as a facilitative captain who oversaw the flow of students' linguistic adventures without dominating the volume of daily conversational interactions. This democratic situation dismantled the psychological barriers of feudalistic patronage that often became the root cause of students' verbal expression deadlock in regular classrooms. Students reclaimed control over their learning trajectories thanks to the freedom of game features that tolerate trial-and-error processes without academic sanctions. This autonomous capacity empowerment gradually melted acute anxiety walls and rewoven shattered self-confidence. Absolute independence in regulating the learning process contributes the highest predictive weight to long-term foreign language literacy success (Pintrich, 2004, p. 388). This transformation of independent personality is strategically valuable for students' future academic escalation.

Mastery of Arabic grammar or syntax is often considered a very complex and frightening subject for non-native students. Difficulties in understanding *Qawaid* and *Nahwu* are dominant contributors to high language anxiety among beginner learners. Gamification provides tactical intervention by presenting these linguistic rules into much more applicable and user-friendly simulations. The use of interactive modules or applications has proven to facilitate the assimilation of abstract Arabic grammar concepts into procedural knowledge that can be immediately practiced. The development of specific learning tools, such as interactive *nahwu* modules, has proven essential to answer these linguistic problems in various *salafiyah* and modern *madrasahs* (Nafisah, Koderi, Akmansyah, Erlina, & Mukhlisin, 2023, p. 92). Game-based teaching material innovation empirically erases the old stigma that Arabic grammar is fraught with psychological pressure.

The perspective of modern Arabic education experts also provides justification for the urgency of revolutionizing the language teaching paradigm from traditional rigid methods towards collaborative communicative approaches. Contemporary scholars and linguists are beginning to reconstruct the view that mechanical grammar indoctrination actually kills natural language acquisition. The use of *tal'ib* or gamification innovation in the classroom is represented as an update of *turuq al-tadris* that reflects the flexibility of the Islamic educational treasure in responding to modernity. This progressive method moves the learning center from mere formula memorization activities towards mastering functional language skills relevant to students' lives. Arabic language academics emphasize the urgency of educational games in accelerating intrinsic motivation while eroding the fear of being wrong in learners' mentality (Al-Khuli, 2000, p. 55). This strategic transformation refutes conservative skeptical views and proves that Arabic is highly compatible with the learning styles of the digital generation.

The sociocultural environment of the school contributes a crucial influence on the optimization of the Arabic gamification program initiated by the teacher council. *Madrasahs* with an egalitarian collaborative climate are more potential in reducing language anxiety rates compared to conservative institutions that enforce rigid discipline. Dialogical interactions among students during the game automatically build a peer support structure valuable for passive-character students. Internal school sociocultural support effectively minimizes the fear of being judged when

students practice pronunciation of new Arabic lexicons. The formation of moderate and tolerant religious character in schools helps present a language practice ecosystem without verbal intimidation (Mukhlishin & Nafisah, 2021, p. 15). This healthy educational ecology positions gamification tools not as a substitute entertainment instrument but as an organic element of the school's quality culture pillars.

Sociocultural review reflects that the success of this pedagogical intervention is highly supported by the calibration of game elements with local ethos values. The engineered competition in the classroom is not at all toxic but is based on a spirit of competing in goodness coherent with the basic philosophy of madrasah education (Mustofa, 2020, p. 78). Cooperative design in group missions successfully prevents the marginalization of students with slower learning speeds than their peers. The construction of this mutually supportive classroom climate facilitates the stable growth of collective self-confidence. Ideal Arabic language teaching practices should continue to incubate this kind of comprehensive methodological flexibility in the future.

Comparative analysis with previous literature demonstrates the unique impact of gamification implementation on learners in the rural landscape context. The madrasah context in rural areas is often overshadowed by limited facilities and the high complexity of stigma towards foreign languages. Gamification strategies provide adaptive pedagogical interventions that do not always require cutting-edge technological infrastructure but focus on social interaction engineering (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 10). The application of role-playing game elements using printed challenge cards is capable of triggering learning immersion equivalent to premium digital platforms. This emotional engagement gradually destroys the assumption that Arabic is a rigid linguistic entity impossible to master (Yunus & Azman, 2019, p. 67).

The strategic role of educators in orchestrating the gamification environment greatly determines the success rate of achieving instructional goals in the classroom. Arabic teachers are required to hold technical control while activating pedagogical sensitivity in aligning the game flow with the madrasah curriculum structure. The readiness of human resource competencies in madrasah institutions is the central foundation in adopting inclusive contemporary learning technology. Improving the quality of educators' human resources in religious institutions requires a systematic, visionary, and sustainable management framework (Ritonga, Jamil, Harvius, & Mukhlishin, 2018, p. 430). The active involvement of teacher facilitators during game activities strengthens professional emotional bonds with students in the field. This harmonious interpersonal relationship between teachers and students ultimately creates a safe zone that eliminates anxiety when expressing oneself in Arabic.

This research promises an injection of progressive paradigms for the formulation of Arabic language education curricula at the primary and secondary religious levels. Instructional designers are now required to proactively explore the utility of gamification to produce learning modules that fully support the escalation of learners' psychological well-being. The reduction of language anxiety should not be ignored as a supplementary product but must be positioned as the main variable whose formation is systematically engineered (Horwitz, 2017, p. 72). The construction of madrasah education policies needs to stimulate comprehensive training for teachers to master specific skills in designing gamified classrooms. This multi-aspect synchronization is projected to

be able to guarantee the continuity of Arabic language education quality in the contemporary era ecosystem.

The synthesis of this series of empirical evidence validates the postulate that gamification is a reliable accelerator in dismantling the fortress of Arabic language anxiety at the secondary madrasah level. The decrease in anxiety fluctuation correlates symmetrically with the escalation of proactive participation, long-term memory vocabulary retention, and speaking agility in front of an audience. The precise success of method implementation in the MTs Nurul Barkah environment should be elevated as a reference model for other Islamic educational entities. The strategic challenge for madrasah policy architects is to guarantee the equilibrium of sustainable programs through the provision of digital infrastructure support and educator expertise supervision. The integration of technological tools into the core of Arabic language education opens a long tunnel towards a teaching civilization that respects the psychological health of the nation's children (Zheng, Young, Wagner, & Brewer, 2015, p. 305). The great future aspiration is to eliminate the phobia of Arabic and make it an instrument of fascinating global civilization literacy.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research empirically proves that gamification implementation significantly reduces Arabic language anxiety among MTs Nurul Barkah students. Game-based instructional approaches effectively transform psychological tension and fear of making mistakes into proactive learning motivation by lowering the affective filter, enabling students to internalize grammatical rules naturally in an emotionally safe environment. The cooperative competitive dynamics successfully reconfigure linguistic cognitive load into participatory challenges free from traditional academic pressure. The strategy's success also demonstrates high adaptability to the sociocultural context of rural madrasahs, where limited technological infrastructure does not become an absolute obstacle when game elements are engineered through social interactions aligned with local values. Gamification is thus affirmed not merely as entertainment but as an essential pedagogical intervention bridging the gap between foreign language complexity and learners' mental resilience.

Optimizing these outcomes requires strategic commitment from educators and madrasah management. Teachers must proactively integrate game mechanics into daily lesson plans through collaborative instructional designs that prevent marginalization of slower learners. Institutions need to facilitate continuous pedagogical training to equip staff with technical skills for designing gamification-based modules using either digital or print media. Curriculum policymakers should accommodate the flexibility of the gamification approach as a standard foundation for contemporary foreign language teaching. Future researchers are encouraged to expand investigations into longitudinal impacts on vocabulary retention and to replicate studies across more varied demographics to validate the universality and flexibility of these pedagogical findings across diverse sociocultural landscapes.

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