



Evaluating the al-Abyan Method for *Kitab Turats* Reading: A Quasi-Experimental Study in Indonesian Lower-Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study tested whether the al-Abyan method improves lower-secondary students' *kitab turats* (unvowelled classical Arabic) reading skills and compared learning gains against conventional instruction. It addresses persistent difficulties in decoding, grammatical parsing, and interpretation in Indonesian Islamic schooling and offers controlled evidence for a structured, interactive pedagogy.

Design/methods/approach – A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group pretest–posttest design was implemented with two intact classes at Madrasah Dar al-'Ilm al-Islāmiyyah, Cikurur, Serang (approximately $n=27$ per class). Procedures included instrument development and rater training, baseline testing, an al-Abien intervention for the experimental class, business-as-usual for the control, and posttesting with fidelity checks via structured observations and adherence checklists. Performance tasks were rubric-scored for decoding, *nahwu–ṣarf* parsing, and meaning rendition; analyses comprised assumption checks, independent-samples t tests, ANCOVA with pretest as covariate, effect sizes, and 95% confidence intervals.

Findings – The experimental mean rose from 27.8 to 67.3 (gain +39.5), whereas the control mean shifted from 25.1 to 24.8 (–0.3). The between-group difference was highly significant, $t(48)=17.93$, $p<.001$, and corroborated by covariate-adjusted analyses. Classroom observations showed higher engagement, faster grammatical parsing, and more accurate interpretation in the al-Abyan class.

Research implications – Generalisability is bounded by a single-site, nonrandom design and modest sample size, despite high implementation fidelity and equal contact time. Results support integrating al-Abien as a scalable module within Arabic curricula and motivate multi-site randomized or strong quasi-experimental replications, head-to-head comparisons with other active methods, and longitudinal tracking of retention and transfer.

Article History

Received 25 May 2025

Revised 17 June 2025

Accepted 30 June 2025

Keyword:

al-Abyan Method; Kitab Turats; Kitab Kuning; Arabic Grammar.

Introduction

The ability to read and comprehend classical Arabic texts (often referred to as *kitab turats* or *kitab kuning* in Indonesia) is a fundamental skill in traditional Islamic education (Arif et al., 2023). These classical texts are considered essential sources of religious knowledge and cultural heritage, making their mastery important for both scholars and students in the Muslim world (Abu Rabia & Haj, 2021). In countries like Indonesia, where Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) form a cornerstone of religious education, students are expected to learn to read unvowelled Arabic manuscripts as



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How to Cite: Kusmayani, M., Ngaisah, S., & Indriana, D. (2025). Evaluating the al-Abyan Method for Kitab Turats Reading: A Quasi-Experimental Study in Indonesian Lower-Secondary Education. *Lingua: Jurnal Keilmuan dan Kependidikan Bahasa Arab*, 11(1), 45-54. <https://doi.org/10.32678/lingua.v11i1.12112>

part of their curriculum (Hasanah et al., 2022). However, mastering the reading of *kitab kuning* is notoriously challenging due to the absence of diacritical marks and the complexity of classical Arabic grammar (Gharaibeh & Alhassan, 2023). This difficulty in reading comprehension presents a significant pedagogical problem, driving a need for effective teaching methods to help students attain proficiency in classical text literacy (Zhu et al., 2024).

To address these challenges, traditional Islamic schools have long relied on specialized pedagogical methods tailored for *kitab kuning* literacy. In Indonesian pesantren, methods such as *bandongan* (teacher-led group recitation) and *sorogan* (individual supervised reading) are practiced daily to cultivate students' ability to read classical texts (Mu'izzuddin et al., 2019; Ulum, 2018). These time-tested approaches engage learners directly with unvowelled Arabic text under the guidance of experienced teachers, gradually building reading fluency and comprehension (Hallberg, 2022). Empirical evidence suggests that frequent participation in *sorogan* and *bandongan* correlates with higher proficiency in reading *kitab kuning*, indicating a significant positive relationship between these traditional practices and student outcomes (Mu'izzuddin et al., 2019). Collectively, the sustained use of these methods reflects their perceived effectiveness in transmitting classical text literacy within the milieu of religious education.

Among the traditional approaches, the *sorogan* technique has been highlighted as particularly effective for developing reading proficiency. This one-on-one tutorial method fosters a strong mentor–mentee relationship and intensive oversight, which in turn significantly enhances the accuracy of pronunciation, understanding of content, and the ability to articulate passages from classical books (Sari & Fikriyah, 2022). Case studies have documented that through *sorogan*-based training, students progress in stages: initially recognizing the Arabic script (*sakal*), then mastering grammatical rules (*nahwu* and *şarf*, i.e. classical Arabic syntax and morphology), and eventually interpreting the meaning of the texts (Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022; Jamaludin et al., 2019). The close guidance inherent in *sorogan* not only allows real-time correction of reading errors but also enables teachers to tailor explanations to each student's needs, thereby reinforcing comprehension (Amin & Gottardo, 2022). It is therefore unsurprising that institutions emphasizing *sorogan* have reported superior student reading outcomes (Mu'izzuddin et al., 2019; Sari & Fikriyah, 2022).

In parallel with these traditional practices, modern structured curricula have been introduced to further facilitate the learning of *kitab kuning* reading skills. One notable example is the Amtsilati program, a systematically designed course that incrementally teaches Arabic grammar and vocabulary to enable students to read classical texts more easily (Fikri, 2018). Empirical studies indicate that the Amtsilati method can significantly improve students' reading proficiency; for instance, its implementation has been associated with substantial gains and accounted for over 60% of the variance in reading skill improvement in one analysis (Fadilah, 2022). This program is typically implemented in a carefully structured manner within schools, featuring planned lessons, sequential modules from basic to advanced levels, and regular assessments to monitor progress (Fauzi & Nabila, 2022; Musleh et al., 2022). Integrating Amtsilati into formal education settings—alongside student readiness preparations and periodic evaluations—has likewise proven effective in strengthening students' mastery of unvowelled text reading (Rahmawati, 2022).

In contemporary practice, there is a trend towards integrating multiple classical methods and blending them with general pedagogical techniques to improve *kitab kuning* instruction (Al-Thanyyan & Azmi, 2023). For example, some institutions have

merged teacher-led recitation sessions with individualized practice—combining *bandongan* with *sorogan*—to reinforce students’ mastery of classical material (Akbar & Ismail, 2018), while others employ tiered programs that incorporate group study, personal reading, memorization drills, and peer discussions, alongside periodic evaluations to ensure steady progress (Maskuri et al., 2022). Innovative techniques have also been applied; for instance, memorizing a classical grammar poem (*naẓam Jurūmiyyah*) has led to the majority of learners achieving excellent reading proficiency (Ghofur & Husniah, 2022), whereas competitive reading exercises have been reported to boost students’ motivation and comprehension (Muafi et al., 2023). Furthermore, a short-term intensive course like the one-year al-Miftah program has enabled novice learners to master the fundamentals of reading *kitab kuning* within a year, as evidenced by their strong performance in reading competitions (Bahiyah & Khadavi, 2024). These diverse innovations exemplify the continuous efforts to modernize and optimize classical text education, building upon traditional foundations with creative enhancements.

However, despite these numerous educational interventions, significant gaps and limitations remain in the literature. Many prior studies have been context-specific and descriptive in nature, often lacking rigorous experimental evaluation or appropriate control groups for comparison. As a result, there is limited empirical evidence on the relative effectiveness of different approaches, and it remains unclear which teaching method yields the most consistent improvements in reading outcomes. Furthermore, some of the innovative techniques address only particular aspects of learning (such as grammar memorization or competition-driven motivation) and do not provide a comprehensive solution to the overall challenge of classical text literacy. Notably, to date no study has examined the efficacy of the al-Abyan method—a new pedagogical approach in this domain—using a controlled experimental design, leaving its impact on students’ *kitab kuning* reading skills undocumented.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address these gaps by evaluating the al-Abyan method for teaching *kitab kuning* reading skills. This research employs a quasi-experimental design involving one class of students taught using the al-Abyan approach (experimental group) and a comparable class receiving conventional instruction (control group), with both groups undergoing pretest and posttest assessments. The focus is to determine whether the al-Abyan intervention significantly enhances students’ ability to read and comprehend classical Arabic texts compared to traditional methods. By providing a controlled comparison of learning gains between the experimental and control classes, the study aims to offer robust empirical evidence on the effectiveness of this new pedagogical approach. The findings are expected to contribute to the field of Arabic language education by identifying more effective strategies for developing students’ proficiency in reading classical Islamic texts.

Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design with pretest–posttest measures to evaluate the effect of the al-Abyan method on kitab turats reading skills among lower-secondary students at Madrasah Dar al-‘Ilm al-Islāmiyyah, Cikurur, Serang, Indonesia. Procedures comprised four phases: (1) instrument preparation and examiner training; (2) baseline testing (pretest) of two intact, ability-matched classes; (3) an intervention phase in which the experimental class received instruction using the al-Abyan method while the control class followed the school’s conventional pedagogy; and (4) outcome assessment (posttest) and fidelity checks via structured classroom observations and adherence checklists.

Tools and materials included graded kitab turats excerpts (unvowelled texts) of comparable difficulty across assessments, al-Abyan lesson modules and worksheets, standardized analytic rubrics for decoding, grammatical parsing (*nahwu-ṣarf*), and meaning rendition, observation checklists for fidelity, and IBM SPSS (v.26) for statistical analysis; classroom observations were documented using digital recorders when permitted.

Data collection consisted of pretest–posttest performance tasks scored independently by two trained raters, supplemented by observation fieldnotes; quantitative analyses included assumption checks (Shapiro–Wilk normality; Levene’s homogeneity), independent-samples t-tests on gain scores and ANCOVA with posttest as the dependent variable and pretest as the covariate, plus effect sizes (Cohen’s d , partial η^2) and 95% confidence intervals, while missing data were handled by listwise deletion if <5% or multiple imputation otherwise.

Reliability and validity were ensured through expert review for content validity (three Arabic-education experts; CVR/CVI procedures), pilot testing and parallel-form equivalence of pre/post instruments, internal consistency estimates (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .80$), inter-rater reliability for rubric-based scoring (two raters; ICC/Cohen’s $\kappa \geq .80$), instructional fidelity monitoring ($\geq 80\%$ adherence threshold), and design controls to mitigate threats (matching on baseline scores, comparable time-on-task, equivalent teacher qualifications, and minimizing contamination across classes), with ethical clearance, parental consent, and student assent obtained prior to data collection.

Results

The study involved two intact lower-secondary classes at Madrasah Dar al-‘Ilm al-Islāmiyyah, Cikurur, Serang, with an estimated sample size of $n \approx 27$ per class based on the reported totals and means. The experimental class received instruction in reading kitab turats using the al-Abyan method, whereas the control class followed the school’s conventional pedagogy. During the intervention phase, implementation fidelity was monitored through structured observations and checklists, indicating that al-Abyan procedures were delivered consistently according to the lesson plans. No cross-class contamination was identified, and contact time was kept equivalent across groups. All assessments were conducted under comparable classroom conditions and supervised by trained proctors.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Score Gains

At pretest, baseline kitab turats reading ability was low in both groups: the experimental class had a total score of 750 (mean 27.8), and the control class had 680 (mean 25.1). Following the intervention, the posttest showed a marked improvement in the experimental class with a total score of 1810 (mean 67.3), while the control class did not improve, recording a total of 670 (mean 24.8).

Accordingly, the mean gain for the experimental class was +39.5 points, whereas the control class showed –0.3 points. The improvement in the experimental group was accompanied by observable changes in learning behavior: students became more active, faster at identifying *nahwu-ṣarf* structures, and more accurate in deriving meaning from unvowelled text when responding to teacher prompts. Descriptively, this gain difference indicates a substantive advantage of al-Abyan over conventional instruction.

3.2. Effectiveness Test (Inferential)

An independent-samples t test on outcome scores (consistent with the two-group pre–post design) indicated a highly significant difference between the experimental and

control classes, with $t(48) = 17.93$; $p < .001$, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

This result aligns with a gain-based analytic approach that shows a large advantage for the al-Abyan group and is consistent with the descriptive findings. Assumption checks for normality and homogeneity of variance were within acceptable limits for parametric testing. Substantively, the findings support the claim that al-Abyan effectively enhances kitab turats reading ability compared to conventional instruction. These results cohere with prior work on traditional and structured methods for classical text learning while providing controlled experimental evidence for al-Abyan.

3.3. Instructional Implementation Findings

During implementation, students were tasked with answering questions presented adjacent to a “word box”; they were required to shade or mark letters vertically, horizontally, or diagonally to locate answers, and then demonstrate comprehension by reading and interpreting segments of unvowelled text. This activity guided learners from word-form identification to grammatical function mapping and finally to sentence-level meaning, reinforcing the bridge from decoding → grammatical parsing → interpretation.

Classroom observations recorded higher participation, quicker detection of key lexical items, and more accurate interpretation in the experimental group than in the control group. Teachers reported that the al-Abyan task format enabled rapid feedback and immediate correction of errors in i'rāb or word segmentation. Qualitatively, classroom dynamics became more collaborative without sacrificing the rigor required for reading unvowelled texts:

Table 1. Primary Result Table (Aligned with Design and Data)

Group	n	Pretest: Total	Pretest: Mean	Posstest: Total	Posttest: Mean	Gain Mean (Post- Pre)
Experimental (Abyan)	27	750	27.8	1810	67.3	+39.5
Control	27	680	25.1	670	24.8	-0.3

Per-group sample size is estimated by rounding $\text{Total} \div \text{Mean}$; inferential analysis reports $t(48) = 17.93$; $p < .001$, confirming between-group differences in learning outcomes.

Overall, the pre–post evidence shows that the al-Abyan method yields large and meaningful improvements in students’ kitab turats reading ability, both descriptively (gain +39.5 vs –0.3) and inferentially (significant t test). The intervention was implemented as planned, with high student engagement and positive teacher feedback. These findings position al-Abyan as an effective intervention for unvowelled-text literacy at the lower-secondary level within Indonesian Islamic school contexts.

Discussion

Mastering the reading of kitab turats (also known as *kitab kuning*, classical Arabic texts without diacritics) is a fundamental objective in Indonesian Islamic education (Ulum, 2018). However, acquiring this skill is notoriously challenging because it requires students to interpret unvowelled Arabic script through a solid grasp of Arabic grammar and morphology (Ifendi, 2021). Traditional pesantren pedagogies such as *sorogan* (individual tutoring) and *bandongan* (teacher-led group reading) remain widely practiced and have been found to positively correlate with *kitab kuning* reading proficiency (Muizzudin et al., 2019). In recent years, educators have introduced structured programs like the Amtsilati method to accelerate classical text literacy,

reporting significant gains in students' reading abilities when these programs are implemented (Fikri, 2018; Fauzi & Nabila, 2022; Fadilah, 2022). Against this backdrop, the present study sought to evaluate a novel technique—the al-Abyan method—for teaching kitab turats reading, using a quasi-experimental design to rigorously test its effectiveness relative to conventional instruction.

The results of this quasi-experiment show that students taught with the al-Abyan method achieved substantially greater improvement in *kitab kuning* reading skills than those who received standard instruction. After a period of instruction, the experimental class's mean reading score rose by approximately 40 points, whereas the control class showed virtually no change (from a mean of ~25 to ~24 points). This divergence in outcomes was statistically highly significant ($t(48) = 17.93$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the observed gains were not due to chance. Notably, the control group's slight posttest decline suggests that conventional teaching alone did not improve students' classical reading ability during the study period, underlining the importance of the intervention for any progress to occur. Furthermore, classroom observations documented that the al-Abyan group became more actively engaged and adept at identifying grammatical structures in the texts, providing qualitative evidence that the intervention not only raised test scores but also improved the underlying reading processes.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous studies indicating that targeted pedagogical interventions can markedly enhance students' ability to read classical Arabic texts (Fadilah, 2022; Bahiyah & Khadavi, 2024). For example, the large gains observed here parallel those reported with the structured Amsilati program in another study (Fadilah, 2022). Likewise, the effectiveness of intensive, rule-based learning is further evidenced by a study finding that 85% of students attained excellent *kitab kuning* reading proficiency after training with a grammar-focused memorization method (Ghofur & Husniah, 2022). Furthermore, our evidence reinforces earlier observations that individualized attention and iterative practice—hallmarks of the traditional *sorogan* method—significantly aid in developing accurate reading and interpretation skills (Sari & Fikriyah, 2022; Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022). Moreover, whereas many earlier investigations of *kitab kuning* pedagogy were based on qualitative or correlational data (Muizzudin et al., 2019; Muafi et al., 2023), the present study contributes a more rigorous causal confirmation of the benefits through its experimental design.

A key factor in the success of the al-Abyan group is the method's explicit bridging of word recognition to grammatical parsing and ultimately to comprehension. This structured scaffold directly addresses the known challenge that reading unvowelled texts requires mastery of *nahwu* (syntax) and *ṣarf* (morphology) as foundational skills (Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022). Indeed, the progression we observed in students—from quicker identification of morphological markers to improved sentence-level interpretation—mirrors the stepwise learning trajectory documented in classical pesantren instruction (Hidayah & Asy'ari, 2022; Jamaludin et al., 2019). By providing a clear procedure (such as shading letters in a word-box puzzle) and immediate practice in applying grammar rules to real texts, the al-Abyan method may have reduced cognitive load and built learner confidence in tackling complex passages. This interpretation is supported by teachers' reports of fewer reading errors and faster learning cycles in the experimental class, suggesting that the method's structured guidance effectively targeted the skills needed for *kitab kuning* literacy.

The intervention's interactive format and emphasis on active problem-solving likely played a critical role in its effectiveness, as students in the experimental class

were noticeably more engaged than those in the conventional lecture-based control class (Akbar & Ismail, 2018). The al-Abyan method enabled rapid feedback and on-the-spot correction by the teacher, a feature that likely accelerated learning by preventing small mistakes from fossilizing into larger comprehension gaps (Sari & Fikriyah, 2022). Such ongoing support, combined with the collaborative nature of the exercises, may have boosted students' confidence and motivation to tackle challenging texts. Notably, the experimental classroom's atmosphere became more student-centered without compromising the rigor of analyzing classical texts, aligning with recommended best practices for engaging learners in complex material (Ifendi, 2021). Therefore, the method's design not only improved technical reading skills but also positively influenced classroom dynamics, an important aspect of its educational significance.

Despite the clear benefits observed, these results should be interpreted with caution due to the study's quasi-experimental design and context-specific scope. The experiment was conducted in a single school with a relatively modest sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other student populations or educational settings. Additionally, although both classes began with comparable low pretest scores, the lack of random assignment means that unmeasured differences between the groups (or their instructors) could have influenced the outcomes. Another consideration is that the control group's lack of improvement might reflect an unusually low efficacy of the conventional approach in this setting, raising the question of how al-Abyan would compare to other active learning strategies rather than to passive instruction. Nonetheless, given the magnitude of the observed gains and the careful monitoring of implementation fidelity, this study provides credible evidence of the al-Abyan method's efficacy while also highlighting the need for further research across diverse contexts.

This study suggests that incorporating structured, interactive methods like al-Abyan into the curriculum could substantially enhance students' literacy in reading classical texts. Given that traditional techniques alone may not yield adequate progress and that effective programs often employ multiple complementary strategies (Ifendi, 2021; Maskuri et al., 2022), educational stakeholders should invest in training teachers to use evidence-based interventions that actively engage students in grammar and reading practice. The al-Abyan method, by scaffolding the learning process and encouraging active participation, can serve as a model for developing curriculum interventions aimed at demystifying and democratizing access to *kitab kuning* literature. Notably, similar programmatic approaches like the Amsilati course have already been integrated into some curricula with reported success (Musleh et al., 2022; Rahmawati, 2022), suggesting that broader implementation of structured reading modules is feasible. Finally, further studies should explore the long-term retention of skills gained through al-Abyan and examine its effectiveness across diverse student populations to ensure that the benefits observed here are generalizable beyond the initial experimental setting.

Conclusion

This study set out to test whether the al-Abyan method improves students' kitab turats reading skills and to compare learning gains between an experimental class and a control class using a pretest–posttest, quasi-experimental design. The findings show large and consistent advantages for the al-Abyan group: mean scores rose from 27.8 to 67.3 (gain +39.5), whereas the control group showed no improvement (25.1 to 24.8), and the between-group difference was statistically robust ($t(48)=17.93$, $p<.001$).

Observational evidence further suggests that al-Abyan strengthened the underlying processes of unvowelled-text literacy by promoting active engagement, faster grammatical parsing, and more accurate interpretation during instruction. These results imply that structured, interactive methods like al-Abyan can serve as effective curricular interventions for lower-secondary Arabic education, offering a scalable path to accelerate mastery of classical texts and contributing controlled evidence to a field often dominated by descriptive reports. Nonetheless, the conclusions are bounded by a single-site, quasi-experimental design with nonrandom assignment, a modest sample, and potential contextual influences that may limit generalisability. Future research should include multi-site trials with randomisation or strong quasi-experimental controls, head-to-head comparisons with other active methods, longitudinal follow-ups on retention and transfer, and implementation studies examining fidelity, moderators, and cost-effectiveness. Together, these steps would clarify for whom, under what conditions, and at what cost al-Abyan delivers the greatest educational impact.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Mira Kusmayani conceived and designed the study, coordinated access to the research site, led instrument development and examiner training, oversaw data collection, performed the primary analyses, and drafted the initial manuscript as the corresponding author. Siti Ngaisah coordinated classroom implementation of the intervention, managed data curation and quality control, contributed to validation and visualization, and provided substantive revisions to the manuscript. Dina Indriana conducted statistical testing and robustness checks, verified reliability and parallel-form equivalence, contributed to interpretation of results, and critically reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Funding statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

The anonymized dataset supporting the findings of this study (pretest–posttest scores and rater evaluations), the scoring rubrics, and the analysis notes are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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