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From Repetition to Reading Fluency: Behaviorist Mechanisms in Early Arabic Literacy Across Two Madurese Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

Accelerated Arabic reading instruction for children in Islamic boarding schools remains insufficiently examined in terms of how instructional strategies reflect behaviorist learning principles. This study analyzes the implementation of accelerated Arabic reading programs at Miftahul Ulum Panyeppen and Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah in Pamekasan, Indonesia, focusing on differences in strategies for developing cognitive and psychomotor skills. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with informants purposively selected based on their involvement in the learning process. The findings indicate that both pesantren employ repetition, reinforcement, and habituation, although Miftahul Ulum emphasizes structured instruction and repeated practice, whereas Nubdzatul Bayan places greater emphasis on social interaction and meaning-making. These findings suggest that behaviorist principles are implemented through context-specific instructional practices shaped by Islamic values and local traditions, offering insights into the development of accelerated Arabic reading instruction in pesantren.

Kata kunci: membaca bahasa Arab akseleratif; pembelajaran behavioristik; pesantren; pendidikan bahasa Arab; pembelajar usia dini

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Abstrak

Pembelajaran membaca bahasa Arab secara akseleratif bagi anak-anak di pesantren masih belum banyak dikaji dari segi bagaimana strategi pembelajarannya merefleksikan prinsip-prinsip pembelajaran behavioristik. Penelitian ini menganalisis pelaksanaan program membaca bahasa Arab akseleratif di Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Panyeppen dan Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah di Pamekasan, Indonesia, dengan berfokus pada perbedaan strategi dalam mengembangkan keterampilan kognitif dan psikomotorik. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi; informan dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan keterlibatan mereka dalam proses pembelajaran. Temuan penelitian mengindikasikan bahwa kedua pesantren menerapkan pengulangan, penguatan, dan pembiasaan, meskipun Miftahul Ulum lebih menekankan pembelajaran terstruktur dan latihan berulang, sedangkan Nubdzatul Bayan lebih menekankan interaksi sosial dan pemaknaan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa prinsip-prinsip behavioristik diterapkan melalui praktik pembelajaran yang kontekstual dan dipengaruhi oleh nilai-nilai Islam serta tradisi lokal, sehingga memberikan wawasan bagi pengembangan pembelajaran membaca bahasa Arab akseleratif di pesantren.

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic reading proficiency is an essential component of Arabic language education in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), where children are introduced to Arabic texts as part of their religious and educational formation (Awaluddin, Ridwan, Riskianti, & Rezki, 2024; Dimyathi, Junaedi, Syaifuddin, & Mas'ud, 2025; Rosikh, Ma'arif, & Ulfa, 2025). Developing this proficiency at an early age presents a pedagogical challenge because beginning learners must acquire letter recognition, sound-symbol

correspondence, word decoding, and reading accuracy through appropriately sequenced instruction (Harpiani, A.m, Ampry, Setiawan, & Sridelia, 2025; Nurhalisa, Rizal, Aqil, Lagandesa, & Fasli, 2025). In Madura, Indonesia, the participation of younger children in pesantren education has created a relevant context for examining how Arabic reading instruction is organized for beginning learners (Hijriyah, Edi, Erlina, Kesuma, & Khodr, 2024; Suryanti, Mukhlishin, & Nurjannah, 2025). Some pesantren have responded by implementing accelerated reading programs that seek to develop reading skills within a structured learning period (Abdullah, 2024; Amalia, 2026; Arif, Nasir, & Ma'arif, 2025; Fauzi, Fakhruddin, Suharsiwi, & Syauqi, 2025). These programs raise an important educational question: how is accelerated Arabic reading instruction organized and implemented for children in traditional Islamic boarding school environments? Addressing this question requires attention not only to the intended pace of learning but also to the instructional practices through which children are guided toward reading proficiency.

Previous studies have examined the development of Arabic literacy, structured reading exercises, and instructional approaches in Islamic educational settings. Research by (Almandury, Ika A, & Pratama, 2022) has been cited in relation to the role of structured and repeated reading practice, while (Wulan, Atikah, & Suhendar, 2022) have been associated with the importance of Arabic literacy and targeted instruction for beginning learners. (Ajeng Rahmawati, 2023) has also been cited in discussions of intensive reading programs in pesantren. These studies provide a starting point for understanding how reading instruction can be organized and why Arabic literacy matters in Islamic education. However, the specific contributions of these studies must be distinguished from the questions addressed in the present research. In particular, the literature reviewed for this study does not yet establish a sufficiently detailed account of how accelerated Arabic reading instruction is organized for children in the two pesantren examined here. Further investigation is therefore needed to document the instructional sequences, learning activities, and teacher–learner interactions that characterize these programs. The final claims about this research gap should be confirmed through a systematic comparison with the full texts of the cited studies and other relevant publications.

Behaviorist learning theory provides an analytical framework for examining the instructional processes involved in these accelerated programs. Its emphasis on observable responses, repetition, feedback, and reinforcement offers a way to investigate how children practise Arabic reading and how teachers respond to their performance. In the context of early Arabic reading instruction, relevant practices may include repeated recognition of letters and words, guided reading, correction of errors, and reinforcement of accurate responses, provided that these practices are documented in the research data. Nevertheless, accelerated instruction should not automatically be classified as behaviorist simply because it involves intensive practice. The relationship between the instructional model and behaviorist principles must be established by examining what teachers actually do, how learning activities are sequenced, and how children's responses shape subsequent instruction. This distinction makes it possible to use behaviorism as an analytical perspective without presuming in advance that every instructional practice in the two pesantren conforms to the theory.

Against this background, this study investigates accelerated Arabic reading instruction for children at Miftahul Ulum Panyeppen and Maktab Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah in Pamekasan, Madura, Indonesia. It aims to describe how the programs are organized and implemented and to examine how their instructional practices

correspond to behaviorist learning principles. The study focuses on the practical organization of instruction rather than assuming that the programs have already demonstrated superior or faster learning outcomes. Its central research question is: How is accelerated Arabic reading instruction for children organized and implemented in the two pesantren, and how do the instructional practices relate to behaviorist learning principles? By investigating the two settings, the study seeks to provide a context-specific account of accelerated Arabic reading instruction within pesantren education. If the data support a comparison between the sites, the analysis will also identify similarities and differences in their instructional arrangements without assuming that the two programs operate identically.

This study advances the argument that accelerated Arabic reading instruction should be examined as a pedagogical process shaped by the sequencing of learning activities, opportunities for repeated practice, feedback, and reinforcement. These instructional components offer a basis for analyzing how the two pesantren organize learning for children and the extent to which their practices are consistent with behaviorist principles. The contribution of the study lies in providing an empirically grounded account of accelerated Arabic reading instruction in two Madurese pesantren, connecting the practical organization of children's learning with a specific theoretical framework. Rather than treating acceleration as proof of improved reading performance, the study examines how acceleration is pursued in practice and what the observed instructional arrangements reveal about the application of behaviorist pedagogy in Arabic language education. Its findings may inform educators seeking to develop structured Arabic reading instruction that responds to the needs of young learners in Islamic boarding school settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted by the researcher at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Panyeppen and Maktab Nubdzatul Bayan Pamekasan, both located in Pamekasan Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The type of research used in this study is qualitative research. Qualitative research methods are procedures that produce descriptive data about people through written or spoken words and observable behavior (L.J Moleong, 2022). As stated by experts, qualitative research aims to observe and reveal a situation or phenomenon in its natural context, uncovering deep meanings and understanding of the issues being studied, which are presented in the form of qualitative data such as words, narratives, or events (Rukin, 2022).

The sources of data in this study are the individuals or entities from which relevant data can be obtained. The researcher used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was directly obtained from the key informants at the research sites, namely the teachers and students of both Islamic boarding schools. Secondary data was collected from various relevant sources such as documents, libraries, institutional archives, and other supporting references.

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation process involved examining the actual conditions in the two pesantren, including daily educational activities, classroom interactions, available teaching resources, and facilities. The goal was to gain a comprehensive picture of how accelerated reading instruction was applied in real educational settings.

Interviews were conducted with teachers and students regarding the design, implementation, and evaluation of the accelerated Arabic reading program in both pesantren. The documentation process included collecting photos, institutional profiles,

curricula, organizational structures, vision and mission statements, and teaching schedules. Tools used included voice recorders, notebooks, and cameras.

Data analysis followed three core steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction involved selecting and summarizing key information, identifying patterns, and eliminating irrelevant content. Data presentation consisted of systematically organizing and displaying the findings in narrative form to facilitate interpretation. The final stage, drawing conclusions, provided explanations for observed phenomena and established relationships, potential causes, and emerging theories. (Fatoni, 2019).

RESULTS

Academic Procrastination as Disruption of the Self-Regulation Cycle

Accelerated reading instruction for children at the Miftahul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Panyepen and the Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah

An effective curriculum must be grounded in four interrelated components: planning, content, instructional strategies, and assessment. Each element plays a critical role in shaping a cohesive and goal-oriented learning experience.

Planning represents the foundational stage of curriculum development. At this point, educators are expected to articulate clear learning objectives, identify key competencies, and allocate sufficient time for each unit of instruction. Well-structured planning serves not only as a roadmap for teachers but also facilitates a systematic and purposeful learning environment for students. This initial phase aligns with Tyler's rationale in curriculum theory, emphasizing goal formulation as a primary driver of instructional coherence.

Content, as the substance of instruction, typically includes vocabulary, grammar, and relevant cultural contexts—especially in language education. To ensure optimal comprehension, the content should be organized in a sequential and logical manner, gradually increasing in complexity. Moreover, content should be tailored to student needs and interests, fostering engagement and intrinsic motivation. This principle reflects Bruner's notion of a spiral curriculum, where learners revisit content with increasing depth and sophistication.

Instructional strategies significantly influence the quality of student learning. The selection of appropriate pedagogical approaches—ranging from project-based learning and group discussions to technology-enhanced instruction—should align with both the learning objectives and student profiles. Diverse strategies can provide multiple entry points for learners, accommodating various learning styles and promoting active participation. In behaviorist-informed contexts, reinforcement and repetition may be dominant, but integrating communicative and collaborative elements enriches the learning experience.

Assessment constitutes the final yet indispensable component. Through formative and summative evaluation methods—including tests, assignments, and projects—educators can measure students' progress toward achieving learning goals. Importantly, assessment not only gauges student performance but also informs curriculum refinement. Feedback derived from assessment practices enables continuous improvement of instructional design and implementation, aligning with the principles of data-driven pedagogy. Mohammad Nasir expressed a similar opinion in his interview response:

> "As teachers, we always strive to make the learning process enjoyable and easy to understand, especially for beginner students. This curriculum has been carefully designed

> to meet the needs of those who are just starting to learn. For example, the approach is simplified so it does not overwhelm them, which helps reduce pressure when learning to read classical texts. We use a repetition method that is structured in a way that helps them quickly become familiar with reading patterns. In addition, we ensure a relaxed classroom atmosphere, making the learning process more effective. We hope that students will be able to absorb knowledge more easily without feeling that learning is a burden."

the accelerated reading instruction for beginner-level students in two Islamic educational Miftahul Ulum Panyeppen and Maktab Nubdzah Al-Bayan Al-Majidiyah—through the lens of behaviorist theory. The findings highlight four major components of curriculum implementation: objectives, content, instructional strategies, and assessment. Although both institutions adhere to the same theoretical foundation, significant differences in pedagogical emphasis and practical application emerged. Based on interviews and classroom observations, the implementation of accelerated reading instruction for beginner-level students at the two Islamic boarding schools revealed the following key findings:

Instructional Objectives: Cognitive vs. Psychomotor Emphasis

Both institutions recognize the importance of integrating cognitive and psychomotor aspects in formulating learning objectives. However, Miftahul Ulum Institute places stronger emphasis on theoretical knowledge to reinforce the students' cognitive framework, while Al-Bayan Institute prioritizes practical and experiential learning aimed at skill application and comprehension. This divergence reflects differing interpretations of behaviorist principles—where Miftahul Ulum tends to align with a classical conditioning approach, and Al-Bayan adopts a more operant and task-based behaviorist orientation. Furthermore, both curricula are heavily influenced by Islamic values, underscoring a religious motivation to foster deep engagement with religious texts through reading.

Content Design: Modular Approach and Structural Rigor

In terms of content, both institutions utilize modular instructional design, supported by visual aids and diagrams to facilitate comprehension. However, their material sources vary. Miftahul Ulum utilizes standardized textbooks such as Miftah al-'Ulum, while Al-Bayan adopts a custom-developed modular book tailored to progressive skill development. Despite their different sources, both curricula reveal a strong inclination toward grammar and morphology (nahw and sarf), which may pose challenges for beginner learners. This heavy linguistic focus—though methodologically rigorous—risks cognitive overload, potentially hindering student motivation and retention at the early stages.

Instructional Strategies: Repetition vs. Interaction

Teaching strategies at the two institutions reflect distinct applications of behaviorist theory. Miftahul Ulum employs repetition and structured drills, closely aligned with reinforcement techniques advocated by B.F. Skinner. Conversely, Al-Bayan embraces interactive group discussions, creating a more dynamic and socially engaged learning environment. This contrast reveals an interesting adaptation of behaviorist learning: while one emphasizes stimulus-response automation, the other enriches behavioral development through social reinforcement and peer feedback. The latter may foster higher-order thinking, especially critical thinking skills often neglected in traditional behaviorist models.

Assessment Practices: Oral Evaluation with Divergent Focuses

Both institutions rely heavily on oral assessments to evaluate reading proficiency, text comprehension, and linguistic analysis. Yet their implementation strategies differ. Miftahul Ulum emphasizes precision in grammatical parsing and syntactic analysis, while Al-Bayan focuses on semantic understanding and contextual interpretation. This divergence reflects their respective pedagogical priorities: structural accuracy versus communicative competence. Although both forms of evaluation are rooted in behaviorist performance assessment, the latter approach may offer greater alignment with functional literacy objectives in modern language education.

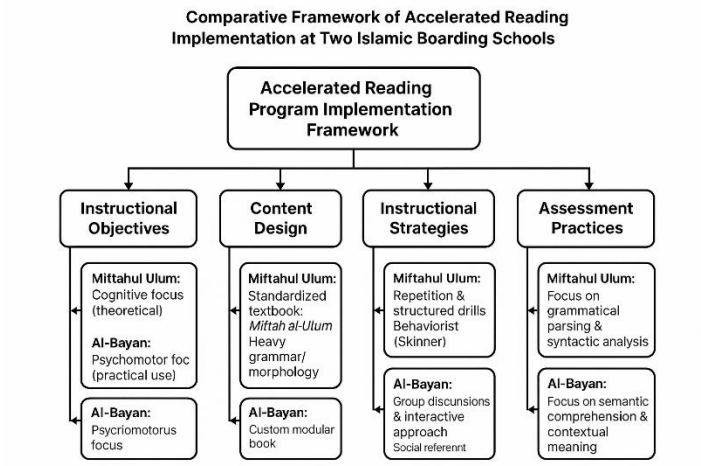


Chart 1: Graph of the comparative framework

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that although both institutions adopt behaviorist principles in accelerating reading instruction for beginner students, their implementation strategies vary significantly—Miftahul Ulum focuses on cognitive reinforcement through repetition and structural accuracy, while Al-Bayan emphasizes experiential learning through interaction and contextual understanding.

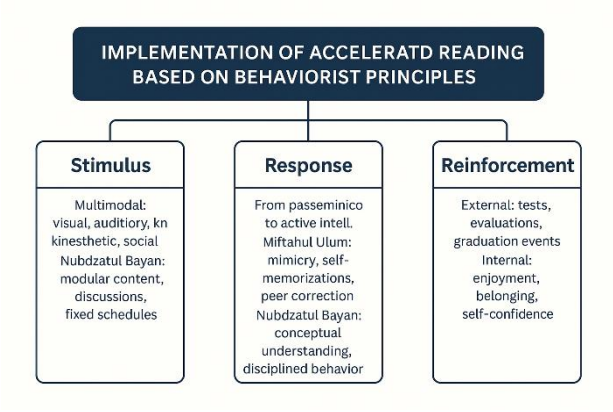


Chart 2: Graph of the Implementattion Accelerated Based Behaviorist Principles

Based on the findings, the implementation of accelerated reading instruction for children at Miftahul Ulum and Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah follows a clear and systematic application of behaviorist principles, focusing on stimulus, response, and reinforcement. In terms of stimulus, both institutions utilize multimodal stimuli

including visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and social elements. At Miftahul Ulum, the use of pictures, chants, and repetitive activities helps create emotional and cognitive connections with the learning material. Meanwhile, Nubdzatul Bayan employs well-structured modular content, collective discussions, and fixed time schedules to foster discipline and active engagement, reflecting a behaviorist emphasis on repetition and order. Regarding student responses, there is evident progression from simple imitation to active and intellectual participation. At Miftahul Ulum, students start by mimicking the teacher's reading, gradually achieving self-memorization and even correcting peers, indicating emotional maturity and cognitive development. At Nubdzatul Bayan, students respond with conceptual understanding, disciplined behavior, and active involvement in extracurricular activities, showing meaningful interaction with the learning environment. In terms of reinforcement, both institutions integrate external forms such as tests, evaluations, and graduation events with internal reinforcement like enjoyment in reading, a sense of belonging, and self-confidence. This indicates that both institutions acknowledge the importance of combining symbolic, structural, and emotional reinforcement to enhance learning based on positive behaviorist reinforcement

DISCUSSION

Boarding School in Panyepen and the Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah

Boarding School in Panyepen and the Nubdzatul Bayan Al-Majidiyah A well-structured curriculum must integrate four essential and interrelated components: planning, content, instructional strategies, and assessment. Instructional objectives serve as the foundational pillar, where educators are expected to define clear learning goals, identify target competencies, and allocate time effectively to support a coherent learning process.

Content should be logically sequenced and tailored to student needs, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, and relevant cultural elements, in order to scaffold student understanding from simple to complex concepts. When content resonates with learners' interests, it fosters higher motivation and engagement.

The choice of instructional strategies plays a crucial role in shaping the learning experience. Whether through project-based learning, group discussions, or the integration of digital tools, varied approaches enable students to explore content from multiple perspectives, thereby deepening their comprehension.

Lastly, assessment functions not only as a tool for measuring student progress but also as a feedback mechanism for refining curriculum design. Both formative and summative assessments—using tests, tasks, or projects—ensure alignment between instructional goals and learning outcomes, while promoting continuous improvement of the teaching process.

In behaviorism, learning is viewed as a change in observable behavior, and this change is facilitated through three foundational elements: stimulus, response, and reinforcement (Akhdan Yafie & Hindun, 2024). The first component—instructional objectives—plays a critical role in initiating the stimulus phase. In both Miftahul Ulum and Al-Bayan, teachers begin by clearly defining learning outcomes and target competencies, which function as stimuli designed to elicit specific responses from students. These objectives are formulated to trigger behaviors such as decoding, pronouncing, and comprehending Arabic script, aligning with Thorndike's Law of Readiness, which states that learning occurs when learners are physically and mentally prepared to respond. (Sikolia Cleophas Kalabai, 2024).

Furthermore, the curriculum content in both institutions emphasizes grammar and morphology, arranged in a modular and sequenced format (Hanif et al., 2025; Suryanto et al., 2024). This aligns with Pavlov's classical conditioning theory, wherein structured repetition and associative learning build familiarity and automaticity in behavior. For example, repetitive exposure to linguistic patterns conditions the learner to associate certain visual or auditory cues with correct responses, such as reading or parsing a sentence.(Moon, Choi, Lim, Lee, & Wi, 2021).

When it comes to instructional strategies, the divergence between the two institutions provides insight into the flexible application of behaviorist methods. Miftahul Ulum relies heavily on drills and repetition, which resonate with Skinner's concept of operant conditioning.(Canvin, Brierley-Jones, Ramsey, Baker, & Berzins, 2024). Students are rewarded with verbal praise or peer recognition when they succeed, thus reinforcing the behavior. Al-Bayan, on the other hand, applies more interactive methods, such as group discussion and timed recitations, which represent social reinforcement—a dimension of behaviorism that is sometimes overlooked but increasingly recognized in modern interpretations. (Simon, 2024).

Finally, the assessment models—primarily oral—function as both summative and formative reinforcement tools. They provide immediate feedback, a critical factor in Skinner's reinforcement theory, which holds that behavior is strengthened when followed by a favorable consequence. In Miftahul Ulum, the focus on grammatical precision ensures reinforcement of structural knowledge, whereas in Al-Bayan, the emphasis on contextual interpretation rewards functional and communicative competence.

Thus, the implementation of instructional objectives across both institutions clearly demonstrates the integration of behaviorist theory into curriculum practice. As stated by Skinner, "Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten"—emphasizing that deeply embedded behavioral patterns, shaped through structured reinforcement, are at the heart of effective education. (Ahadiyah, Zahidi, & Hidayatussholihah, 2024; Arisnaini, 2022; Bahruddin, Zamroni, & Kausar, 2026).

These findings are similar to the study conducted by(Al-Mosawi, 2023), which stated that the formulation of instructional objectives in behaviorist-based curricula must integrate both cognitive and psychomotor targets to support measurable learning outcomes. Their study emphasized the importance of clarity in goals and reinforcement through structured repetition, aligning with the practices observed at both Miftahul Ulum and Al-Bayan.

However, this result also differs from the findings of (Rohmawati & Kusmanto, 2022), who argued that behaviorist instruction often neglects the affective dimension of learning, such as emotional engagement and motivation. In contrast, the current study demonstrates that both pesantren have adapted behaviorist principles with sensitivity to students' emotional and religious needs, particularly by embedding Islamic values in the learning process and creating a safe, motivating classroom atmosphere.

Thus, the implementation of the accelerated learning program at Miftahul Ulum Islamic Boarding School Panyeppen and Nubdzatul Bayan Majidiyah Islamic Boarding School Pamekasan reflects a contextual integration of behaviorist principles. Learning objectives are not only formulated based on measurable cognitive and psychomotor outcomes, but are also aligned with religious values that foster students' intrinsic motivation. This approach demonstrates that behaviorism

can be applied adaptively in the pesantren education system, provided that reinforcement is delivered through strategies that are culturally and pedagogically appropriate

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the accelerated reading instruction implemented at Miftahul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in panyeppen and Nubdzatul Bayan Majidiyah Islamic Boarding School in Pamekasan does not merely reflect classical behaviorist principles such as reinforcement and stimulus-response. Surprisingly, it also integrates religious values and emotional engagement, which significantly enhance students' involvement in learning. This indicates that the application of behaviorism in the pesantren context transcends mechanical repetition—it embraces a more affective, spiritual, and culturally rooted approach.

This research offers a novel perspective on the application of behaviorist theory in Islamic education settings. While previous studies often portrayed behaviorism as a rigid and mechanistic model, the current findings both confirm and extend the theory by illustrating its flexible and humanistic adaptation within the pesantren environment. Moreover, the study uncovers distinct behaviorist implementations across two institutions: one prioritizing structured drills and the other favoring interactive and socially driven reinforcement. This contributes a contextualized understanding of behaviorism shaped by faith-based learning environments.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is limited to two pesantren in the Madura region, restricting the generalizability of the findings to a broader educational context. Second, it focuses only on beginner-level students and teachers, without exploring variations across educational levels or age groups. Third, the study relies solely on a qualitative descriptive approach, which limits the ability to measure learning effectiveness quantitatively. Therefore, further research is necessary, ideally employing mixed methods and involving a larger and more diverse sample across multiple regions and educational settings. Such research would enable a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding, ultimately guiding the development of more targeted and culturally responsive accelerated learning policies in Islamic boarding schools.

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