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Class Stratification and Qira'ah Proficiency in Ma'had Al-Jami'ah: A Qualitative Evaluation

M. Jais Kaharudin¹ Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, Indonesia¹

muhammadjaiskaharudin@gmail.com¹

Widiya Yul² Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, Indonesia²

widiyayul@iainkerinci.ac.id²

Riko Andrian³ Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia³

riko.andrian@uin-suska.ac.id³

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Corresponding Author: M. Jais Kaharudin

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ABSTRACT

Background : Reading Arabic texts (Qira'ah) is a fundamental skill in Arabic language learning, particularly within Islamic higher education. However, diverse levels of student proficiency often result in learning gaps that hinder instructional effectiveness. To address this, class classification strategies based on initial Arabic ability have been introduced as a pedagogical innovation to enhance differentiated instruction and equitable learning outcomes.

Objective: This study aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of class classification strategies in improving students' Qira'ah proficiency and to identify pedagogical factors that support or hinder the successful implementation of this approach.

Method : This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, utilizing interviews and classroom observations as the primary tools for data collection. The participants consisted of eight Arabic language instructors and twenty students representing various proficiency levels. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in learning experiences and instructional effectiveness across different class categories.

Results and Discussion : The findings indicate that diagnostic assessments effectively support student placement, allowing instructional materials to align with learners' linguistic readiness. Beginner students showed marked improvement in vocabulary mastery and comprehension, while advanced students benefited from authentic text engagement and analytical exercises. Nevertheless, limited class mobility and uneven progression across levels constrained the system's overall effectiveness.

Conclusion and Implications : Adaptive and context-based class classification strategies are essential to enhancing Qira'ah competence. The study recommends continuous formative assessment, mentoring systems involving peer tutors, and targeted teacher training to ensure sustainable improvement. These findings contribute to the development of more inclusive and responsive Arabic pedagogy in Islamic higher education..

Keywords:

Arabic Pedagogy, Class Stratification, Differentiated Learning, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, Qira'ah

ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang : Kemampuan membaca teks Arab (Qira'ah) merupakan keterampilan dasar dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab, terutama di lingkungan pendidikan tinggi Islam. Namun, perbedaan tingkat kemampuan awal mahasiswa sering menimbulkan kesenjangan belajar yang menghambat efektivitas pembelajaran. Untuk mengatasi hal tersebut, strategi klasifikasi kelas berdasarkan kemampuan awal bahasa Arab diterapkan sebagai inovasi pedagogis guna meningkatkan pembelajaran terdiferensiasi dan pemerataan hasil belajar.

Tujuan : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi secara kritis efektivitas strategi klasifikasi kelas dalam meningkatkan kemampuan Qira'ah mahasiswa serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor pedagogis yang mendukung maupun menghambat keberhasilan penerapannya.

Metode : Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan observasi kelas terhadap delapan orang pengajar dan dua puluh orang mahasiswa pada berbagai tingkat kemampuan. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik untuk mengungkap pola pengalaman belajar dan efektivitas pengajaran pada tiap kategori kelas.

Hasil dan Pembahasan : Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa asesmen diagnostik efektif dalam mendukung penempatan mahasiswa sesuai tingkat kemampuan, sehingga materi pembelajaran dapat disesuaikan dengan kesiapan linguistik mereka. Mahasiswa tingkat dasar menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam penguasaan kosakata dan pemahaman teks, sedangkan mahasiswa tingkat lanjut memperoleh manfaat dari keterlibatan dengan teks autentik dan latihan analitis. Namun demikian, keterbatasan mobilitas antar kelas menyebabkan stagnasi dalam pencapaian hasil belajar secara menyeluruh.

Kesimpulan dan Implikasi : Strategi klasifikasi kelas yang adaptif dan berbasis konteks terbukti penting dalam meningkatkan kompetensi Qira'ah. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan asesmen formatif berkelanjutan, sistem mentoring berbasis teman sejawat, serta pelatihan guru yang terarah. Hasil ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan pedagogi bahasa Arab yang lebih inklusif dan responsif di pendidikan tinggi Islam.

Kata Kunci

Pedagogi Bahasa Arab, Klasifikasi Kelas, Pembelajaran Terdiferensiasi, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, Qira'ah.



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INTRODUCTION

Qira'ah, or the ability to read Arabic texts, is a foundational skill in Arabic language education, particularly within the context of Islamic higher education. At Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, Qira'ah is not merely regarded as a linguistic competency but as an essential tool for accessing classical Islamic literature, which serves as an authoritative reference across various Islamic disciplines.[1] However, in practice, students entering Ma'had Al-Jami'ah possess diverse levels of Arabic proficiency, posing significant challenges to effective and equitable instruction. One emerging strategy is class stratification based on students' initial Arabic competencies.[2] Unlike prior studies on academic tracking in general schools, this research examines proficiency-based stratification in a Ma'had setting where classical Arabic literacy is central to religious scholarship. This strategy aims to implement more differentiated instruction by aligning materials, methods, and teaching approaches with the specific needs of each group. Consequently, lower-proficiency students are not left behind, while advanced learners remain intellectually challenged.

Although class stratification is increasingly implemented in Ma'had institutions. However, empirical evaluations of class stratification in Indonesian Ma'had contexts remain scarce. This is

despite its crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of Arabic language instruction, particularly students' qira'ah proficiency. In many Ma'had, students enter with diverse levels of Arabic proficiency, posing challenges for instructors in adjusting teaching methods, materials, and approaches. Class stratification, which places students into groups based on their initial proficiency, has the potential to provide more differentiated and equitable learning, ensuring that lower-proficiency students are not left behind while more advanced learners continue to be intellectually challenged. This raises critical questions: to what extent does class stratification improve qira'ah outcomes? How does it affect student motivation and engagement? Is this strategy flexible enough to accommodate students' developmental changes throughout the learning process? This study aims to examine the practice of class stratification at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, State Islamic Institute of Kerinci, with a focus on its effectiveness in enhancing qira'ah proficiency through data collected from interviews with instructors and students, as well as direct classroom observations. At the same time, there is a tension between the administrative demands for standardization—such as efficient class scheduling—and pedagogical needs for flexibility and adaptiveness.^[3] Therefore, this study offers a critical evaluation of the implementation of class stratification at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah State Islamic Institute of Kerinci to determine its actual impact on students' Qira'ah proficiency and to provide data-driven recommendations for improvement. The research employs a qualitative approach to gain in-depth insights into teachers' and students' perspectives, as well as classroom dynamics. Its findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more context-responsive and effective Arabic language learning models in Islamic higher education institutions.

One of the central forms of Qirā'ah instruction that plays a pivotal role in Arabic language education within this context is Qirā'at al-Kutub.^[4] Qirā'at al-Kutub refers to the instructional process of reading classical Arabic texts, commonly known as kitab kuning. Etymologically, Qirā'ah means "reading," while Kutub means "books." In terminological terms, Qirā'at al-Kutub denotes the practice of reading unvocalized classical Arabic texts (kitab kuning) in accordance with proper Arabic grammatical rules. Consequently, the effectiveness of class stratification strategies in the teaching of Qirā'at al-Kutub warrants critical examination, particularly in light of the linguistic and methodological challenges involved, as well as the need for adaptive instructional approaches tailored to the characteristics of students in Islamic higher education.

Qirā'at al-Kutub refers to the instructional process of reading classical Islamic texts, commonly known as kitab kuning.^[5] Linguistically, the term Qirā'at al-Kutub is derived from the Arabic root Qirā'ah, from Qara'a, meaning "to read," while Kutub denotes "books" or "texts." Terminologically, it is defined as the process of learning to read unvocalized classical Arabic texts (kitab kuning) in accordance with proper and accurate Arabic grammatical rules.^[6]

In studying Qirā'at al-Kutub, precision in understanding each individual word is essential, as every word carries meaning and plays a significant role in sentence structure to convey comprehensible information.^[7] Mastery of vocabulary (mufradāt) is also a fundamental component of Qirā'at al-Kutub, as lexical knowledge forms one of its essential pillars. Prior to engaging with Qirā'at al-Kutub, students are generally expected to acquire foundational knowledge in key linguistic disciplines such as nahw (Arabic syntax), šarf (morphology), among others. These disciplines are traditionally taught in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) or in specialized institutions dedicated to the study of classical Arabic texts (kitab kuning).^[8]

The background of students coming from Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) naturally differs from those who are not. This background can influence students' Qirā'ah abilities, as there is often a distinct disparity in the Qirā'ah proficiency between students from general schools and those from pesantren.^[9] Students from pesantren typically possess more advanced Qirā'ah skills than their counterparts from general schools. These differences can affect the

learning process [9], as some students may be lagging behind or lack a foundational understanding of Qirā'at al-Kutub, resulting in a lack of progress for those who do have the necessary skills.

Therefore, the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah State Islamic Institute of Kerinci has established a classification system for its classes, namely the Muftadi', Mutawassit, and Mahir levels. These class levels are assigned based on the initial proficiency of the students. The Muftadi' class consists of students who can read the Qur'an but lack foundational Qirā'ah skills, while the Mutawassit class includes students who can read the Qur'an and possess some Arabic vocabulary (mufradāt). The Mahir class is composed of students who are proficient in reading the Qur'an, have an extensive vocabulary, and come from pesantren where they have studied classical Arabic texts (kitab kuning).

The existence of these class levels or classifications will undoubtedly lead to differences in the progress made by the students. For students who are not from pesantren, improvements can be observed in their learning outcomes. For example, before studying, they may not have been able to distinguish between fi'l (verbs) and ism (nouns), but after the learning process, they are able to differentiate between the two.

Therefore, the researcher will evaluate the effectiveness of class classification in improving the Qirā'ah abilities of students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah State Islamic Institute of Kerinci, in order to assess the extent to which class classification can enhance students' Qirā'ah skills. The aim of this study is to determine whether the class classification system contributes to improving students' abilities, and to identify what aspects of the method may need to be added or adjusted. Additionally, this research will explore the supporting and inhibiting factors involved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Effectiveness of Learning

According to Emulyasa, as cited in Farid Agus Susilo's article, effectiveness is a measure indicating the extent to which targets or objectives (in terms of quantity, quality, and time) have been achieved. Effectiveness reflects the degree of attainment of the goals that have been set.[10] The effectiveness of learning can be examined from several aspects, including effective communication, good organization, a positive attitude toward students, flexibility in learning approaches, good student learning outcomes, and enthusiasm for the learning material.[11]

Effective learning is strongly supported by the teacher's competence in teaching as well as classroom management and organization. Common challenges faced by both novice and experienced teachers are related to classroom management and teaching methods. Effective classroom management is a prerequisite for effective instruction, while the teacher's teaching strategies also significantly influence the improvement of learning effectiveness.[12]

Learning effectiveness is a measure of success in the interaction process between students and teachers in an educational context to achieve learning objectives. Effectiveness can be observed through students' engagement during lessons, their responses to instruction, and their mastery of concepts. To achieve effective and efficient learning, reciprocal interaction between teachers and students is essential, alongside alignment with school conditions, facilities and infrastructure, as well as appropriate learning media to support students' holistic development.[13]

Effective learning is the key to achieving educational goals, whereby students acquire not only academic knowledge but also social and emotional skills. Literature studies indicate the

importance of diverse teaching methods and media to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences. For example, the "course review horay" model has been proven to enhance student engagement in elementary science learning, suggesting that such approaches can increase student participation in the teaching-learning process.[14]

The role of technology in education is also undeniable. E-learning models have been shown to be effective in improving students' understanding of mathematical concepts, especially complex ones. Research indicates that integrating technology enhances learning motivation and academic achievement. With broader access to digital learning resources, students can learn in more flexible and interactive ways.[15]

Teachers also play a pivotal role in fostering effective learning. Educators who frame learning as a collaborative experience are more successful in capturing students' interest and attention. Research shows that students actively engaged in discussions or group projects demonstrate a better understanding of the material. Problem-Based Learning (PBL), for instance, enables students to learn while solving real-world problems, thereby strengthening their critical and creative skills.[16]

Parents and the community also have a significant impact on learning effectiveness. Parental involvement in children's education can improve academic achievement, while their participation in school activities helps create a more supportive educational environment, motivating children to learn. A study revealed that parent-involved learning models can enhance students' academic success.[17]

Diverse learning media, such as books, videos, and interactive software, also play a vital role in capturing students' interest. Research on technology integration in classrooms shows that students are more motivated when learning with interactive and innovative media. For example, animated instructional videos can clarify complex concepts that may not be easily understood through text alone.[18]

In conclusion, learning effectiveness is highly influenced by teaching methods, media, and the role of all stakeholders in education. Research demonstrates that the use of technology, diverse teaching methods, and community and parental involvement significantly improve students' learning outcomes. Therefore, it is essential for educators to continuously update and implement innovative strategies in the learning process to ensure that educational goals are effectively achieved.[19]

The literature review is written in 500 to 2001 words. The literature review should present the general picture within which the focus of the study may fit. For example, how "motivation" may fit into "foreign language education." It also should contain the conceptual definition of the study's main concepts or variables and theoretical support. It is then followed by analyzing previous studies related to the topic discussed in the study.

b. Class Classification

The following is a synthetic table of literature on the study of class grouping in Islamic institutions:

No	Peneliti (Tahun)	Lokasi dan Jenis Lembaga	Tujuan/Fokus Penelitian	Metode	Temuan Utama
1	Zubaidah (2020)	IAIN Tinggi	To examine the effectiveness of class grouping based on students' educational	Quantitative	Grouping classes based on students' educational backgrounds facilitates material

			backgrounds in mastering Arabic.		adjustment; significant differences in learning outcomes were found among groups. ¹
2	Hafis dkk (2022)	Karabuk Universitesi	To analyze Arabic learning strategies during the pandemic and the impact of adaptive class grouping	Qualitative	Flexible and temporary class grouping based on ability levels helped maintain learning continuity and student motivation.
3	Sulasmi dkk (2022)	STIT Diniyyah Puteri Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah Padang Panjang	To assess the effect of intensive Arabic programs on improving language proficiency	Qualitative	Participants showed significant improvement; the intensive model is suitable for short-term grouping based on language levels.
4	Mohamed (2023)	Department of Languages, Information and communications, Faculty of Arts Humanities, Manchester	To classify and grade Arabic texts for use in structured language learning	Quantitative	Grading Arabic texts according to difficulty facilitates level-based curriculum design and supports effective class placement.
5	Tomasik dan Trudell (2024)	Studi tinjauan internasional	To review the impact of ability grouping on academic achievement and inclusivity	Systematic literature review	Ability grouping has pedagogical benefits but may risk equity issues; flexible grouping and periodic evaluation are recommended.

Class grouping in Arabic language learning within Islamic educational institutions is a pedagogical strategy designed to align the teaching process with students' levels of language competence. This concept is rooted in the theories of ability grouping and placement testing, which emphasize the importance of aligning learners' prior abilities with instructional materials and teaching approaches. The practice of class classification aims to make Arabic language instruction more effective, efficient, and adaptive to students' diverse abilities—particularly in institutions such as pesantren and ma'had, where learners come from various educational backgrounds. A study conducted by Zubaidah(2020)[20] at IAIN Bukittinggi demonstrated that dividing classes based on students' educational

backgrounds significantly improved Arabic language proficiency. Students with prior pesantren experience who were placed in advanced classes showed more consistent progress compared to those in mixed-ability settings. These findings are consistent with Hafis (2022)[21], who investigated Arabic learning strategies during the pandemic in several Indonesian pesantren, where flexible, ability-based grouping systems were proven effective in maintaining learning continuity and enhancing students' motivation.

Furthermore, Sulasmi (2024)[22], in her evaluation of the Arabic Camp program, found that grouping participants based on their proficiency levels prior to training accelerated the internalization of Arabic language skills, particularly in speaking and listening. This intensive model was considered effective as it allowed learners to experience instruction suited to their linguistic capacity. In the international context, Mohamed (2023)[23] emphasized the significance of gradation in Arabic language pedagogy, where determining the difficulty level of learning materials facilitated the implementation of ability-based class groupings. Such an approach provides a clear framework for developing tiered curricula aligned with learners' linguistic progress—from the foundational to the advanced levels.

From a theoretical perspective, Tomasik and Trudell (2024)[24] argued that ability grouping enhances learning effectiveness when applied flexibly and supported by periodic evaluation. Conversely, rigid grouping may create disparities among students and hinder educational inclusivity. Therefore, class classification in Arabic language learning within Islamic institutions should be designed dynamically, allowing student mobility across levels based on ongoing formative assessments. This aligns with Hafis (2022), who found that adaptive grouping models enable teachers to adjust instructional strategies and materials according to each group's specific needs.[21]

In the context of Arabic language learning, class classification is structured into three levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced education. At the elementary level, Arabic learning emphasizes listening skills (maharah istima') and speaking skills (maharah kalam). At the intermediate level, instruction is balanced across all four skills: listening (maharah istima'), speaking (maharah kalam), reading (maharah qira'ah), and writing (maharah kitabah). At the advanced level, Arabic language instruction focuses primarily on reading (maharah qira'ah) and writing (maharah kitabah), equipping learners with the ability to access and engage with various Arabic-language references.[24]

In addition to placement testing, the development of tiered learning materials plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of class classification. Mohamed's (2023) study revealed that employing materials with progressive levels of difficulty improves students' comprehension of Arabic texts and assists teachers in setting realistic learning targets.[23] Within the context of Arabic language education in modern pesantren and ma'had al-jami'ah, such an approach is highly relevant, as learners pursue varied goals ranging from functional communication skills to the mastery of classical religious texts.

Class grouping also has significant implications for learner motivation and engagement. Several local studies indicate that students placed in classes with peers of similar proficiency levels exhibit greater confidence and more productive learning interactions. Nevertheless, international studies caution against overly rigid grouping practices. As noted by Tomasik and Trudell (2024), flexible grouping—which allows periodic reassessment of student placement—is more effective in promoting equitable learning outcomes and maintaining healthy classroom dynamics.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that class grouping in Arabic language education is not merely an administrative strategy but a complex and context-sensitive pedagogical approach. Its effectiveness depends largely on the quality of placement assessments, tiered

curriculum design, teachers' ability to implement differentiated instruction, and institutional policies that support student mobility between levels. Consequently, class classification in Islamic educational institutions should be viewed as an integral component of an adaptive learning system—one that integrates continuous evaluation, scaffolded material design, and ongoing teacher professional development to achieve the ultimate goal of Arabic language education: communicative and academic proficiency.

c. Qira'atul Kutub

Qira'atul Kutub, which literally means “the reading of books,” plays a pivotal role in the tradition of Islamic literacy. Emphasis on accurate reading—both in terms of technique and meaning—constitutes a central aspect of Islamic education. Qira'at enables learners not only to understand the text but also to internalize its content and spiritual context. This underscores that proficient reading serves as a foundation for acquiring deeper knowledge of religion.[25]

Historically, various forms of qira'at have developed across regions, reflecting the diversity of pedagogical approaches in religious learning. Qira'at encompasses not only the mechanics of recitation but also comprehension of meaning and textual interpretation. Variations of qira'at produced by scholars have enriched the tradition of reading while simultaneously fostering intellectual dynamism, allowing for diverse debates and interpretations within Islam. This indicates that qira'at holds a significant role in cultivating the intellectual tradition of Muslims.[26]

The role of qira'at in studying the Qur'an is particularly crucial. Accurate recitation, including mastery of tajwid, may alter the meaning of verses. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstanding, which in turn influences individual beliefs and religious practices. Therefore, in-depth knowledge of qira'at is indispensable for preserving the authenticity and originality of Islamic teachings.[27]

In the modern era, challenges in teaching qira'at have grown more complex with the advancement of information technology. Digital tools have emerged as effective media for teaching qira'at to younger generations. Through applications and online platforms, qira'at instruction can be delivered in more interactive and engaging ways, making it easier for students to comprehend. This creates new opportunities for developing pedagogical methods of qira'at that remain relevant in contemporary contexts.[28]

Proficiency in qira'at also contributes significantly to the formation of an individual's religious identity. Mastery of qira'at provides a strong foundation for understanding and practicing Islamic teachings. By comprehending texts deeply, individuals can develop robust moral and ethical principles that ultimately shape their daily behavior. This demonstrates that qira'at is not merely a technical skill of reading but also a transformative tool for nurturing the character of a devout Muslim.[29] With the increasing interest in qira'at, further efforts are necessary to preserve and promote this tradition, particularly among younger generations. Qira'at instruction should be integrated into broader Islamic educational curricula, emphasizing its significance in understanding religion. Community engagement and institutional support are crucial in fostering awareness of the importance of qira'at within society.[30]

METHOD

a. Research Methods

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach, allowing data to be presented comprehensively and in detail without any manipulation of research variables.[31] The data collected reflect the actual condition of class stratification practices at the research site. Accordingly, the researcher conducted interviews with students and teachers (ustadz/ustadzah) at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah State Islamic Institute of Kerinci, alongside direct classroom observations, to assess the effectiveness of class stratification in enhancing qira'ah proficiency.

2. Participants

The primary participants in this study were twenty students (mahasantri) and eight instructors (ustadz) within the Ma'had setting. Research questions:

RQ1; Bagaimana sistem klasifikasi kelas diterapkan di Ma'had Al-Jami'ah IAIN Kerinci?

RQ2 ; Apa dampak stratifikasi terhadap perkembangan kemampuan qira'ah mahasiswa di tiap level?

RQ3; Apa faktor pendukung dan penghambat dari stratifikasi terhadap peningkatan kemampuan qira'ah mahasiswa?

3. Instruments and collection

Class placements were determined based on students' initial proficiency. To measure this, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah administered a standardized test in the form of written questions or a questionnaire. Observations were then conducted to determine the appropriate class placement for each student. This study used both interview and observation techniques to collect valid data from the perspectives of both teachers and students. The research instruments included interview guidelines and observation checklists, which served as the primary data collection tools.

4. Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, in line with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of class stratification practices. The data analysis stages included:

1) Data Transcription

Interviews with teachers (ustadz/ustadzah) and students were fully transcribed. Classroom observation notes were also documented.

2) Data Coding

The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to identify emerging main themes, such as:

- Criteria for class grouping (initial ability, interest, prior learning experience)
- Teaching strategies applied according to student level
- Challenges and impacts of class stratification on Arabic language learning

3) Categorization and Theming

After coding, the data were grouped into broader themes to facilitate interpretation. Examples include:

- Theme 1: Strategies for grouping students
- Theme 2: Adjustments in teaching methods and learning materials
- Theme 3: Effectiveness and challenges of implementation

4) Data Interpretation

The researcher then interpreted the findings in the context of relevant literature, comparing practices at Ma'had with established theories of ability grouping and placement testing.

5. Data Validation (Trustworthiness)

To ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative data, several strategies were applied following [32] and [33]:

1) Data Triangulation

Integrating data sources from student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observations to obtain a comprehensive perspective.

2) Member Checking

The researcher confirmed preliminary findings with participants (teachers and students) to ensure that the data interpretation accurately reflected their experiences.

3) Audit Trail

All steps of data collection and analysis were meticulously documented, including field notes, interview transcripts, and coding, allowing the study to be audited and verified.

4) Peer Debriefing

Discussions with colleagues or academic supervisors were conducted to gain critical feedback on the analysis process and interpretation.

5) Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher continuously reflected on their position, biases, and influence on the research process to maintain the objectivity of data interpretation.

b. Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study on class grouping in Arabic language learning within Islamic educational institutions, ethical principles were strictly observed to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research process. Following the ethical framework outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher ensured that participation was entirely voluntary and based on informed consent. All participants were clearly informed about the research objectives, data collection procedures, and the potential benefits and risks of their involvement. [32]

Respect for participants' privacy and confidentiality was prioritized throughout the study. Student data—such as placement test results, class performance, and interview responses—were anonymized to prevent identification and were used solely for academic purposes. Consistent with Creswell's (2018) recommendation, all data were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' rights.

Given that the study was conducted in Islamic learning environments such as pesantren and ma'had al-jami'ah, cultural and religious sensitivity was essential. Ethical considerations included showing respect for institutional hierarchies, maintaining gender-appropriate communication norms, and ensuring that the research process aligned with the moral and educational values upheld by the institutions. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize, establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research requires respect for participants' worldviews and contextual realities.[33] Therefore, the researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the study, acknowledging personal biases and ensuring objectivity in data interpretation.

Finally, the dissemination of results was carried out responsibly. The findings were reported accurately and transparently, without manipulation or distortion, and institutional stakeholders were provided with feedback intended to enhance pedagogical practices related to Arabic class grouping. Upholding these ethical standards ensured that the study contributed meaningfully to both the academic discourse and the practical development of Arabic language education within Islamic contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on interviews with instructors at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah State Islamic Institute of Kerinci, class stratification is considered an effective alternative for addressing the diverse initial abilities of students. The variation in students' proficiency levels makes it impractical to place all students in the same classroom, as disparities in comprehension and learning pace can hinder the learning process. Students with no prior knowledge of Arabic must work much harder compared to those with foundational skills. Therefore, class stratification provides a practical solution by allowing instruction to be tailored according to each student group's initial capabilities.

Class assignments are made following an initial placement test designed to assess students' Arabic proficiency. There are three class levels: the Muftadi' class for students who can read the Qur'an but lack basic Arabic skills, the Mutawassit class for those with basic vocabulary and comprehension, and the Mahir class for students proficient in reading classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning). Teachers are also assigned according to these levels, with instructors for each class trained and qualified to address the respective students' proficiency.

The implementation of class stratification at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah has generally proceeded smoothly and aligns with institutional goals, as evidenced by noticeable improvement in students' knowledge. However, this outcome does not fully reflect the objectives of the Arabic specialization (takhasus) program, which aims to produce students proficient in qira'atul kutub. Currently, only students in the Mahir class reach this goal. A contributing issue is the lack of upward class mobility: students remain in the same level without promotion even as their skills improve. Although instructional materials are progressively enhanced within each class, students in the Muftadi' class experience slower development in achieving the program's ultimate objectives.

1. Student Characteristics and the Implementation of Class Stratification

Class stratification is recognized as an effective strategy for addressing the variations in students' prior knowledge and skills. Interview results reveal that such differences are inevitable in higher education settings, where students come from diverse educational backgrounds and possess varying degrees of Arabic proficiency. These differences significantly affect the learning process, making it essential to organize classes in a manner that allows each individual to achieve optimal learning outcomes. This aligns with Slavin's assertion that grouping students based on academic ability can enhance instructional

efficiency and learning outcomes by allowing instructors to tailor their methods to students' specific needs.[34]

In higher education, students with strong foundational skills tend to comprehend instructional material more quickly and thoroughly than those with lower proficiency. When all students are placed in the same classroom regardless of their abilities, the disparity can create inequitable learning conditions. Less prepared students often struggle to keep up, potentially resulting in poor learning outcomes.[35] Hence, class stratification serves as a necessary intervention to ensure both fairness and effectiveness in the classroom.

This system also allows instructors to adapt teaching methods and materials to the ability level of each class. In classes with higher proficiency students, teachers can introduce more advanced concepts and engaging activities. Conversely, for lower-level classes, instructors can focus on foundational knowledge and use simplified approaches. This not only improves students' understanding but also builds their confidence.

Differentiated instruction is one of the key principles in this stratification system. According to Tomlinson, differentiation involves tailoring teaching methods, content, and assessments to suit students' readiness, interests, and learning styles. Within this context, class stratification facilitates differentiation by enabling teachers to identify which areas require additional support or enrichment.[35] This targeted approach allows students with initially low abilities to thrive through focused guidance and appropriate learning scaffolds.



Picture 1. Basic Forms of Differentiated Instruction

Beyond academic support, class stratification also positively impacts student motivation and engagement. Anglin and Ley argue that learning environments aligned with students' physical and cognitive capacities foster a sense of empowerment and promote active participation.[36] Being grouped with peers of similar abilities reduces anxiety and enhances students' comfort in classroom interactions. Additionally, healthy competition within groups can stimulate peer learning and reinforce subject mastery.

Findings from this study align with the results of interviews conducted at the Ma'had of State Islamic Institute of Kerinci, which reveal that class stratification has a tangible impact on enhancing students' motivation and engagement in learning. Instructors reported that when students are placed in classes according to their proficiency levels, they tend to participate more actively in the learning process and exhibit greater self-confidence. The adjustment of teaching methods and materials to match students' cognitive capacities and readiness allows for a more effective and focused learning experience. Moreover, students expressed that they feel more comfortable and less pressured when studying alongside peers with relatively

similar levels of ability. This significantly reduces anxiety, particularly in language practice, where a high degree of self-confidence is essential. In some classes, a healthy sense of competition among students has also emerged, fostering a spirit of academic enthusiasm and dynamic interaction that further strengthens collaborative peer learning.

Class stratification offers several significant benefits in the context of language education. One of the primary positive impacts is the enhancement of student motivation and learning engagement. Grouping students based on comparable proficiency levels makes the learning process more relevant and targeted, thereby encouraging active classroom participation. Furthermore, tailoring instruction to match students' cognitive and physical capacities facilitates greater comprehension and absorption of the material.

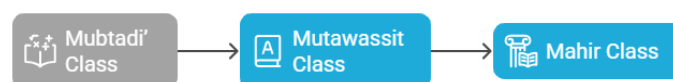
Proficiency-based grouping also contributes to the reduction of learning anxiety. Students do not feel overwhelmed, as they are placed in an environment that matches their abilities, fostering a more comfortable and supportive learning atmosphere. Additionally, this system promotes peer learning and creates a constructive competitive environment within the group. When managed effectively, such competition can reinforce content mastery and boost students' confidence in using Arabic in an active and practical manner.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. One major concern is the potential for stigmatization [37], where students in lower-tier classes may feel inferior or excluded. To mitigate this risk, educational institutions must cultivate a positive and inclusive learning culture where students are valued for their effort and growth. A respectful, community-oriented classroom ethos can help diminish negative perceptions and foster mutual support across class levels.

Another critical consideration is managing student transitions between class levels. Those who demonstrate substantial progress should be given opportunities to move to more advanced classes. This reflects the educational principle that every student has the potential to grow when provided with the right support.[38] A flexible class stratification system enables institutions to adapt to students' development and facilitate upward academic mobility.

In conclusion, class stratification is a vital tool in higher education for addressing differences in student abilities. By grouping students according to skill level, educators can adjust instructional strategies, foster motivation, and create inclusive learning environments.[39] However, implementation must be handled with care to avoid stigmatization and ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to progress and realize their full academic potential.

The classification of classes in Arabic language education at Islamic educational institutions follows a systematic approach, beginning with an initial placement test to assess students' competencies prior to their assignment to specific classes. This process is essential to ensure that each student can study in an environment aligned with their language proficiency. The classification system comprises three levels, each designed to accommodate varying levels of linguistic ability.



Picture 2. Student levels comparison

The first level, Mubtadi' Class, is designated for students who are just beginning their Arabic language journey and possess only rudimentary skills, such as basic Quranic recitation, without deeper linguistic competence. This is in line with Ahmad Noviansah's assertion that

ability-based class separation significantly enhances foreign language acquisition by allowing instructors to deliver appropriate materials and prevent confusion among novice learners.[39]

The second level, Mutawassit Class, consists of students who already have foundational Arabic knowledge but remain at an intermediate proficiency. In this class, learners begin engaging with more complex linguistic elements, such as grammar and a broader vocabulary. This pedagogical approach draws on the principle of educational stratification, which posits that intermediate classes allow for the delivery of diverse materials that stimulate language development without overwhelming students.[40]

The third level, Mahir Class, is intended for students who have advanced proficiency, including the ability to read classical Islamic texts (kutub turāth). In this class, students refine their reading skills, conduct textual analysis, and deepen their grammatical understanding. This advanced stage plays a critical role in equipping students to interact analytically with classical Arabic texts, thereby preparing them for more rigorous academic challenges.[41]

The teaching process in each class level is also influenced by the proficiency of the instructors. In the Muftadi' class, instructors are trained to communicate in a simplified manner, using accessible language that accommodates beginning learners. They are expected to cultivate a non-intimidating learning environment where students feel comfortable and supported.[31] In the Mutawassit class, instructors possess deeper linguistic knowledge, enabling them to provide more elaborate explanations and apply advanced teaching techniques. Interactive learning and discussions are frequently used to foster active student engagement.

For the Mahir class, instructors are carefully selected for their experience and advanced Arabic proficiency. These educators serve not only as teachers but also as mentors who inspire students to deepen their appreciation and mastery of the Arabic language and its literary heritage. This educator placement strategy reflects the institution's core pedagogical philosophy, which seeks to optimize learning outcomes through strategic instructor-student alignment.

The overall class structure is therefore designed to provide effective education tailored to students' proficiency levels. Class classification is not merely an administrative measure but a fundamental part of a thoughtfully crafted teaching and learning process. Through this approach, students are expected to develop not only technical proficiency in Arabic but also the ability to apply it across broader academic and everyday contexts.

Students are encouraged to progress according to their capabilities, with regular evaluations in place to ensure that those who meet the requirements may advance to higher-level classes. Hence, the classification system functions not only as a categorization tool but also as a strategic framework for planning more effective learning pathways. Teachers play a central role in adapting their instructional methods to meet students' needs, which becomes a key pillar in achieving the institution's educational objectives.

Through this structured and systematic approach, the institution aspires to nurture a generation of Muslims proficient in Arabic, capable of understanding and internalizing the values embedded in classical texts. This approach aligns with the educational vision of many Islamic institutions, which prioritize quality and continuous improvement in both teaching and learning processes.[41]

The classification system at Ma'had al-Jami'ah represents a crucial component of Arabic language instruction, designed to address the diverse learning needs of students through a more organized framework. The classification process has generally been effective, as evidenced by the significant knowledge gains observed among students. However, despite its

successes, the methodology does not fully align with the core objective of the Arabic specialization (takhaṣṣuṣ), which aims for deep and specific proficiency, particularly in the reading of classical texts (Qirā'at al-Kutub), which are central to Islamic scholarship and include subjects such as jurisprudence (fiqh), Sufism, and linguistics.

Proficiency in reading kutub turāth is essential, as it forms the foundation for comprehending complex religious texts. While the Mahir class is structured to meet this objective, not all students have the opportunity to advance to this level. The current system presents challenges that hinder student mobility, particularly from the Muḥtadī' to the advanced class. Students who fail to progress often remain in the same level for extended periods, leading to stagnation in their learning journey.

This stagnation is partly due to limitations in the evaluation and promotion mechanisms between levels. Without effective and equitable assessment tools, students struggle to achieve the desired learning outcomes.[42] Although class materials are adjusted to match students' abilities, this alone is insufficient to foster the mastery required for reading classical texts. Consequently, students in the beginner class frequently face difficulties in keeping pace with more advanced instruction.[43]

It is therefore crucial to recognize that class classification impacts not only learning outcomes but also student motivation. Grouping students must be done in a manner that presents appropriate challenges relative to their proficiency level. Prolonged placement in the same level without noticeable progress can diminish students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning. To realize the goals of the Arabic specialization program, students must receive constructive feedback and clear evaluations to support their development.[44]

Furthermore, key components should be added, such as a mentoring system [45] where advanced students assist beginners in their learning journey. Peer teaching can enhance comprehension and accelerate learning. In this context, senior mentors or tutors provide not only academic support but also bolster the confidence of novice learners. This method has proven effective in several other educational institutions that employ similar learning models.[44]

It is also crucial to consider the psychological aspects involved in language education. Stress and confusion experienced by students—especially when they feel incapable of keeping up with the lessons—can significantly hinder their academic progress. By implementing a more refined assessment structure and paying attention to the mental well-being of students, institutions can foster a more supportive learning environment. When students feel acknowledged and included in a positive academic atmosphere, they are more likely to remain motivated and committed to achieving optimal outcomes.[46]

The reality that many students in the Muḥtadī' class feel constrained in their learning process underscores the need for a more comprehensive and flexible evaluation system. For students who have not, or are unable to, progress to higher levels, it is essential to redefine learning strategies that accommodate individual differences. A more personalized approach to instruction is expected to accelerate their pathway toward achieving proficiency in qirā'at al-kutub.

There should be a shift toward competency-based assessments that evaluate not only the final outcomes but also the learning process itself. This includes formative evaluation involving continuous observation and constructive feedback. Such a system can better determine when a student is ready to advance to the next level.[47]

Given these challenges, it is imperative for Ma'had al-Jami'ah to develop more inclusive and effective strategies for class classification. Through the integration of techniques and

approaches that are oriented toward students' individual needs, Arabic language education at the ma'had can not only run smoothly but also achieve its ultimate goal: cultivating students who are proficient in qirā'at al-kutub. Purpose-driven education should aim not only to increase knowledge but also to equip students with practical skills that can be applied in daily life, thereby fostering their independence in the future.

Therefore, comprehensive reform in both teaching methodologies and assessment practices is essential to realizing the educational vision of Ma'had al-Jami'ah. The dissemination of values aligned with the Arabic specialization (takhaṣṣuṣ) must be embedded in every classroom and supported by precise and empowering evaluation processes, enabling students to reach their full potential in mastering qirā'at al-kutub.

Table 1. Student levels comparison

Characteristic	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Skill Level	Basic skills	Foundational knowledge	High proficiency
Linguistic Competence	Lacking	Beginning	High

2. Analysis of Qira'ah Proficiency Improvement through Class Stratification

Analyzing students' qira'ah proficiency is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of instruction. Qira'atul kutub encompasses not only the ability to read but also to understand meanings and apply the embedded values within the texts. One effective way to assess this is through direct observation. This allows educators to realistically gauge how students interact with the texts and learning materials. Observation also enables assessment of critical aspects such as reading fluency, intonation, grammatical parsing (i'rab), and comprehension of the meanings conveyed. Moreover, instructors can monitor students' reactions and participation during lessons, which is useful in determining more effective teaching strategies moving forward.

Additionally, qira'atul kutub proficiency can be analyzed by comparing students' initial scores before instruction with their scores after completing the learning process. This comparison provides clear insight into the students' progress. Initial assessments serve as a baseline, while post-instruction scores reflect the effectiveness of the teaching methods applied. This approach evaluates not only the learning outcomes but also the effectiveness of teaching processes and strategies in enhancing students' mastery of classical Arabic texts.

The findings indicate significant improvement in students' ability to read and comprehend classical texts, varying across different class levels. Each level implements a distinct curriculum tailored to students' proficiency. In the muḥtadī' (beginner) class, the focus is on the fundamentals of reading—such as recognizing Arabic letters, diacritical marks, and basic reading techniques. Notably, this level saw the most substantial improvement, as students began not only reading correctly but also understanding the meanings of commonly used words in religious texts.

One of the key indicators of progress is students' ability to use newly learned vocabulary in everyday communication. In the muḥtadī' class, learners were introduced to key terms found in the Qur'an and Islamic literature—such as concepts related to worship, morality, and religious values. After a period of study, many began incorporating this vocabulary into classroom discussions and daily interactions, reflecting meaningful internalization of the material.

The importance of student engagement is evident here. When students actively use their newly acquired vocabulary in conversation, it signals successful integration of learning. It also indicates that the instruction is effective and has motivated students to apply their knowledge practically. This process contributes not only to academic growth but also to the formation of character and religious values.

By applying innovative teaching methods such as interactive media and contextualized instruction teachers have successfully created an enjoyable and effective learning environment (Amdhi et al., 2023). A positive and supportive atmosphere is crucial, not only in terms of physical conditions (e.g., classroom comfort, resource availability), but also psychological and social dynamics. Students thrive when they feel emotionally supported, secure, and enjoy healthy interpersonal relationships with their peers and instructors.[49] This is particularly important in the context of Qira'atul Kutub, which demands high concentration, deep understanding of Arabic grammar (nahwu and sharaf), and strong analytical skills for reading classical texts without vowel markings.

Overall, the analysis of *qirā'at al-kutub* proficiency among male and female students demonstrates that the instructional approaches employed are highly effective in enhancing their ability to read and comprehend classical texts. Observations and comparative assessments indicate that, in the *mubtadi'* (beginner) level, a holistic approach emphasizing meaning comprehension and its application in daily life plays a crucial role in achieving optimal learning outcomes.

At the *mutawassit* (intermediate) level, a significant improvement is observed in students' ability to critically engage with *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), which is a key indicator of mastery in Islamic studies—particularly in the disciplines of tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and other Islamic sciences. This proficiency reflects the depth of students' understanding as well as their fluency in reading, interpreting, and analyzing traditional texts that form the core of classical Islamic education. Mastery of these texts signifies a substantial development in critical analysis and argumentative skills, both of which are essential for advancing in Islamic scholarship and constructing a comprehensive understanding of religion.[50]

In contrast, at the *mahir* (advanced) level, the improvements go beyond academic competence, extending to practical skills that support both learning and teaching processes. Students at this stage demonstrate greater maturity in instructional abilities, including the capacity to deliver content systematically, respond effectively to peer inquiries, and adapt teaching methods to suit diverse learning needs. Teaching ability serves as a key indicator of subject mastery. This development suggests that the learning process not only encompasses text and theory acquisition, but also evolves toward pedagogical expertise and effective communication in the transmission of knowledge.[51]

The development observed across both levels indicates a progressive enhancement in the teaching and learning of Islamic sciences from foundational comprehension to instructional proficiency and scholarly advancement. Several factors contribute to this growth, including the teaching methodologies employed, integration of technology, and students' intrinsic motivation and commitment to deepening their knowledge. Within this context, it is crucial to recognize that the increased capacity for engaging with *kitab kuning* at the intermediate level represents a foundational step in building robust scholarly competence. Meanwhile, the development of teaching skills at the advanced level is vital for sustaining scholarly traditions and elevating the future quality of Islamic education.

3. Class Stratification in the Perspective of Differentiated Instruction Theory

One of the approaches to class stratification is differentiated instruction. Differentiation refers to modifications or variations in teaching that align with students' abilities, interests, and learning styles. A key characteristic of differentiated instruction is curricular and methodological flexibility, aiming to meet the unique needs of each student. By implementing differentiation, educators can provide more inclusive and relevant learning experiences, encouraging students to reach their full potential.

In this context, class stratification becomes an integral part of differentiated strategies. It enables instructors to group students according to their ability levels and learning needs. This organization allows educators to assess which areas require more focused attention. For instance, students with lower proficiency can be placed in smaller groups for more individualized support. Such a targeted approach ensures that every student receives the necessary guidance to improve.

When students are grouped by proficiency, instructors can adjust their methods accordingly. For beginners, more contextual and practical approaches may be effective. This aligns with the principle that teaching should be adapted to the needs and capabilities of learners.

Differentiation also considers students' interests and learning preferences. Some may prefer visual learning, while others respond better to auditory or kinesthetic approaches. With class stratification, teachers can better understand and address these preferences. For example, in teaching Qur'anic reading, audiovisual media can be used to engage auditory learners more actively.

In the long run, this strategy helps build confidence and motivation among students. As learners recognize their progress, their self-esteem and interest in learning grow. Research confirms that proper instructional adjustments and support systems significantly enhance learning motivation and academic success.[35]

4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Class Stratification Implementation

Supporting Factors:

- Teacher proficiency aligned with class level
- Instructional content tailored to students' needs
- Increased student motivation and curiosity
- Class levels that match student competencies

Inhibiting Factors:

- Wide variation in students' initial abilities
 - Increased stress and confusion among students
 - Lack of class mobility—students remain at the same level without promotion
 - Lack of student interest in learning Arabic
 - Insufficient training for teaching staff

These insights suggest that while class stratification can enhance instruction, it requires careful planning, ongoing assessment, and mechanisms for advancement to ensure all learners benefit equally from the program.

5. Limitations

The limitations of this study are divided into two main aspects: limitations in the context of implementing the class classification strategy and limitations in the qualitative research methodology itself.

a. Limitations in the Implementation of the Class Classification System

The primary limitations identified are inherent in the practice of class stratification at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, which can hinder the overall effectiveness of the system. These limitations include:

- **Limited Class Mobility:** The current class classification system is less flexible due to restrictions on students' mobility to higher levels (from Mubtadi' to Mutawassit or Mahir) even when their abilities improve. Students who do not show progress often remain stagnant at the same level for a long time, which hampers their overall learning advancement.
- **Misalignment with Program Objectives:** The implementation of class stratification is not yet fully aligned with the core objectives of the Arabic specialization program (takhaṣṣuṣ), which aims to produce students proficient in Qira'at al-Kutub. Currently, only the Mahir class tends to achieve these objectives, while students in the Mubtadi' class experience slower development in reaching the program's final targets.
- **Limitations in Evaluation and Promotion Mechanisms:** Student stagnation is partly caused by limitations in effective and fair evaluation and promotion mechanisms between levels.
- **Potential Stigmatization:** Although the system may increase motivation within peer groups, there is a theoretical and practical risk of stigmatization, where students in lower-level classes (Mubtadi') may feel inferior or isolated.

b. Limitations of Research Methodology

As a qualitative study, this research has limitations related to the nature of the methods used:

- **Scope and Generalizability:** This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with an in-depth focus on a single location (Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, State Islamic Institute of Kerinci) with a limited number of participants (eight instructors and twenty students). Therefore, the findings are contextual and may not be directly generalizable to other Ma'had institutions without contextual adjustments.
- **Data Focus:** The research data primarily comes from interviews and observations. This limitation means that the analysis emphasizes perceptions and classroom dynamics (pedagogical factors) rather than quantitative data measuring the statistical impact of the system on students' Qira'ah score improvements over the long term.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Class stratification serves as a strategic and equitable approach to managing the diverse Arabic proficiency levels among students. By grouping learners according to their readiness, instructors can deliver instruction that matches students' linguistic abilities and optimize learning outcomes. However, the current system's limited mobility between levels particularly from the mubtadi' (beginner) class to higher levels has caused stagnation and reduced motivation. To address this, class grouping should be complemented by fair assessment mechanisms, structured progression systems, and formative evaluations that consider both process and outcomes.

A more inclusive and dynamic stratification model is essential for fostering continuous improvement in Qira'atul Kutub competence. Integrating mentoring systems, where advanced students assist beginners, can enhance comprehension, motivation, and confidence. In addition, learner-centered instruction and psychological support play a vital role in sustaining engagement. Reforming instructional and assessment practices, supported by adaptive feedback and contextualized teaching, will enable the realization of Arabic education's ultimate vision producti.

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