



The ALMA Method as an Instructional Innovation for Improving Classical Islamic Text Reading Proficiency in Pesantren Education

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Received:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
18 August 2025	29 October 2025	18 November 2025	17 December 2025

Abstract:

Despite the central role of *kitab turats* in Islamic education, many Islamic boarding schools continue to face difficulties in developing adequate reading competence because of grammar-centered, time-consuming instructional methods. This study aims to examine the effectiveness and sustainability of the ALMA Method as a rapid instructional approach for improving *kitab turats* reading skills among *pesantren* teachers. Employing a qualitative action research design, the study was conducted in five Islamic boarding schools across West Java, Indonesia, involving 185 teachers. Data were collected through observations, interviews, documentation analysis, and pretest–posttest assessments. The findings reveal a substantial improvement in documented reading performance, with average scores increasing from 50.6 to 87.8, supported by consistent improvements in observed instructional practices. Strong institutional acceptance further indicates the method's sustainability beyond the training period. This study contributes a structured, practice-oriented model that bridges Arabic syntax and the reading of classical texts. It is recommended that *pesantren* integrate the ALMA Method into regular instruction to strengthen religious literacy and pedagogical effectiveness.

Keywords: ALMA Method; Turats Literacy Book; Pesantren Pedagogy; Arabic Syntax Instruction

Abstrak:

Meskipun *kitab turats* memiliki peran sentral dalam pendidikan Islam, banyak pondok *pesantren* masih menghadapi kesulitan dalam mengembangkan kemampuan membaca yang efektif akibat metode pembelajaran yang berfokus pada tata bahasa dan memerlukan waktu panjang. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji efektivitas dan keberlanjutan Metode ALMA sebagai pendekatan pembelajaran cepat untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca *kitab turats* pada guru *pesantren*. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain action research kualitatif yang dilaksanakan di lima pondok *pesantren* di Jawa Barat, Indonesia, dengan melibatkan 185 guru. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, analisis dokumentasi, serta tes awal dan tes akhir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan kemampuan membaca yang terdokumentasi, dengan rata-rata skor meningkat dari 50,6 menjadi 87,8, disertai perbaikan konsisten pada praktik pembelajaran yang teramat. Tingginya penerimaan kelembagaan menunjukkan keberlanjutan metode ini setelah masa pelatihan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menghadirkan model pembelajaran terstruktur dan aplikatif yang menjembatani sintaksis Arab dengan pembacaan teks klasik. Metode ALMA direkomendasikan untuk diintegrasikan ke dalam pembelajaran *pesantren* guna memperkuat literasi keagamaan dan efektivitas pedagogik.

Kata Kunci: ALMA Method; *Kitab turats* Literacy; Pesantren Pedagogy; Arabic Syntax Instruction

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How to Cite:

Rusman, M., Alfiani, D. A., Maulana, A., & Nurajizah, A. (2025). The ALMA Method as an Instructional Innovation for Improving Classical Islamic Text Reading Proficiency in Pesantren Education. *IJ-ATL (International Journal of Arabic Teaching and Learning)*, 9(2).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33650/ijatl.v9i2.13964>

INTRODUCTION / المقدمة

Education remains a foundational pillar for societal development, transcending socioeconomic boundaries and shaping intellectual, moral, and cultural capacities. In Indonesia, education is not merely a mechanism for skills acquisition but also a medium for preserving religious values and social cohesion. One of the most distinctive educational institutions contributing to this role is the *pesantren*, the oldest indigenous Islamic education system in the archipelago (Derbesh, 2023; Kamorudeen, 2024; Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2024). Despite Indonesia's high literacy rate, which has reached approximately 96.7% in recent years, functional literacy within religious education, particularly the ability to read classical Islamic texts (*kitab turats*), remains uneven. This discrepancy highlights a crucial societal issue: literacy achievements at the national level do not automatically translate into mastery of specialized religious texts. Given that the *kitab turats* serve as primary references for Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and ethics, difficulties in reading them may weaken the transmission of Islamic intellectual heritage (Abdurrahman, 2025; Amrullah & Mutholingah, 2025; Yakin, 2024). Therefore, developing effective methods to enhance the reading competence of *kitab turats* is not only academically significant but also socially urgent.

Despite their historical prominence, many Islamic boarding schools face persistent challenges in ensuring that students master reading and comprehension of *kitab kuning*, which are typically written without vowel markers (*harakat*). This problem is exacerbated by shifts in educational orientation, where modern *pesantren* increasingly prioritize general subjects, foreign languages, and administrative efficiency over deep engagement with classical texts (Aweida, 2025; Faradj, 2020). As a result, even students who have studied Arabic grammar for years often struggle to decode and interpret unvowelled texts independently. This situation creates a paradox: *pesantren* are widely recognized as centers of Islamic scholarship, yet many graduates lack sufficient proficiency in reading foundational religious sources (Aweida, 2025; Mokrani, 2023). The problem is not merely pedagogical but structural, involving teaching methods that are often repetitive, time-consuming, and highly dependent on individual teachers' explanations. Without methodological innovation, the gap between institutional goals and learning outcomes continues to widen, threatening the sustainability of *pesantren*'s scholarly identity.

Field observations across various Islamic boarding schools in West Java reveal a recurring phenomenon: students demonstrate enthusiasm for learning *kitab turats* but frequently experience frustration due to slow progress in reading competence. Traditional methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* remain dominant, yet these approaches often rely heavily on teacher-centered explanations and require long learning periods before students achieve autonomy (Fidan, 2023; Hardiansyah, 2022). In many cases, students memorize grammatical rules but cannot apply them effectively when encountering new texts. This challenge is not limited to traditional *pesantren*; even modern institutions report similar difficulties, with some gradually reducing the intensity of *kitab kuning* studies (Yugo, 2025; Zakaria et al., 2025). Interviews and training sessions with teachers further indicate a growing demand for practical, structured, and time-efficient methods that can accelerate reading proficiency without sacrificing grammatical accuracy. These empirical realities underscore the need for an instructional approach that bridges classical scholarship with

contemporary pedagogical efficiency.

Previous studies have extensively examined strategies for teaching Arabic grammar and reading classical Islamic texts. Madi (2018), Çakın (2022), and Alharbi (2024) Emphasizes the importance of contextual grammar instruction to improve students' comprehension of unvowelled texts. Yu et al. (2021), Schwartz et al. (2025), and Usman et al. (2024) Highlights the effectiveness of structured learning models in enhancing language acquisition outcomes in *pesantren* settings. Meanwhile, Zakaria et al. (2025) and Osias Kit T. Kilag et al. (2023) Focuses on teacher competence as a determining factor in successful *kitab kuning* instruction, and Fauzi (2019) explores the integration of modern pedagogical tools into traditional Islamic education. However, these studies primarily concentrate on theoretical frameworks, teacher capacity, or incremental curriculum improvements. Few have proposed a concise, step-by-step method that systematically accelerates reading ability in a short period of time (Al-Matham & Al-Khalifa, 2021; Nurhayati, 2022). Moreover, existing research often lacks empirical testing across multiple *pesantren* contexts. This gap indicates the need for a method that is both pedagogically innovative and practically scalable, particularly within diverse *pesantren* environments.

The ALMA Method represents a pedagogical innovation by offering a structured five-step approach specifically designed to enhance the rapid reading of *kitab turats* through applied Arabic syntactic analysis. Unlike conventional methods that require prolonged exposure and gradual mastery, ALMA emphasizes pattern recognition, functional grammar, and immediate application to authentic texts (Bauer et al., 2021). Its novelty lies in its ability to simplify complex grammatical concepts into operational reading strategies that can be grasped within a relatively short training period. As a state-of-the-art contribution, the method aligns classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary instructional design, addressing both cognitive efficiency and contextual relevance. Importantly, the ALMA Method is not intended to replace traditional *pesantren* learning models but to complement them by strengthening students' foundational reading competence. This makes it particularly significant for *pesantren* striving to maintain their scholarly identity amid globalization and educational modernization.

Based on the issues identified, this study addresses the central research problem: how can the ALMA Method effectively improve the ability of *pesantren* teachers and students to read *kitab turats* quickly and accurately? The study argues that a structured, step-based approach to Arabic syntax can significantly reduce learning time while enhancing comprehension and learner confidence. Preliminary findings from training and mentoring programs conducted in five Islamic boarding schools across West Java demonstrate strong institutional interest and positive learning outcomes, with participant numbers exceeding initial targets and most trainees mastering the method within 30 minutes. This research contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of a scalable instructional model tailored to *pesantren* contexts. Academically, it enriches the discourse on Islamic education pedagogy; practically, it offers *pesantren* a viable solution to preserve and strengthen the tradition of *kitab kuning* literacy.

RESEARCH METHOD / المنهجية

This study employs a qualitative action research design, chosen for its suitability in improving educational practices through reflective and participatory processes (White &

Cooper, 2022). Action research is particularly appropriate because the primary objective of this study is not theory generalization, but the enhancement of pedagogical practice, specifically, improving teachers' capacity to teach *kitab turats* using the ALMA Method. The design allows researchers and practitioners to collaboratively identify problems, implement actions, observe outcomes, and reflect on improvements in real instructional settings. As emphasized by Plumley et al. (2024), action research is cyclical and context-sensitive, making it highly relevant for *pesantren* environments where learning traditions are deeply embedded. In the Indonesian educational context, this approach aligns with the Penelitian Tindakan principles, which emphasize continuous professional development and practical problem-solving in teaching and learning.

The research was conducted in five Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) across West Java, selected purposively to represent geographical diversity, institutional characteristics (traditional and semi-modern *pesantren*), and ongoing engagement with *kitab kuning* instruction. West Java was chosen due to its high concentration of *pesantren* and its strategic role in preserving classical Islamic scholarship. The research informants consisted of 185 *pesantren* teachers, all of whom are directly involved in teaching Arabic grammar or classical Islamic texts. The distribution of participants was as follows: Nashrul Haq Al-Islamy Tasik *Pesantren* (40 teachers), ALMAA *Pesantren* Bogor (40 teachers), Al-Mutawally *Pesantren* Kuningan (40 teachers), Insan Madani *Pesantren* Bandung (25 teachers), and Alma Asy-Syauqy *Pesantren* Cirebon (40 teachers). These informants were selected based on their teaching experience, relevance to the research focus, and willingness to participate in training and mentoring activities.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and credibility (Vandenhende et al., 2022). First, participant observation was conducted during training and mentoring sessions to document teachers' engagement, instructional practices, and responses to the ALMA Method. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected teachers and *pesantren* leaders to explore their perceptions, challenges, and pedagogical experiences regarding the teaching of *kitab turats*. Third, documentation analysis was employed, including training materials, lesson plans, and reflective notes produced during the mentoring process. In addition, pre-tests and post-tests were administered as supporting instruments to capture changes in teachers' understanding and instructional competence when applying the ALMA Method. Although quantitative in form, these tests functioned as complementary data within the qualitative action research framework.

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative model consisting of data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification. Data condensation involved selecting and focusing on relevant information related to the implementation and outcomes of the ALMA Method. During data reduction, recurring themes such as teaching effectiveness, comprehension speed, and instructional confidence were identified and categorized. The reduced data were then organized and presented through narrative descriptions and comparative tables to facilitate interpretation. Finally, data verification was conducted by continuously revisiting field notes, interview transcripts, and observation results to confirm emerging patterns and ensure consistency across data sources. This iterative process was carried out throughout the action research cycles to support reflective refinement of the instructional practice.

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, this study applied several qualitative rigor strategies. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from observations,

interviews, documentation, and test results. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Prolonged engagement during training and mentoring sessions strengthened contextual understanding and minimized researcher bias. Additionally, peer debriefing with fellow researchers and educators was used to evaluate the analysis process critically. These strategies collectively enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION / نتائج البحث و المناقشة

Result

This section presents the key findings of the study, derived from interviews, observations, and analysis of documentation conducted during the implementation of the ALMA Method. The results are organized into three main sub-findings: institutional acceptance and sustainability, instructional effectiveness, and documented improvement in Reading *kitab turats*. Together, these findings illustrate the method's pedagogical impact and practical viability.

Pedagogical Acceptance Method Sustainability

Institutional acceptance and sustainability in this study refer to the extent to which Islamic boarding school teachers and administrators perceive the ALMA Method as relevant, practical, and feasible for continued implementation beyond the training period. This sub-finding is operationally identified through participants' expressed enthusiasm, willingness to adopt the method in daily teaching practice, requests for follow-up training, and institutional support for integrating the process into existing instructional routines. Acceptance is not measured by test scores but by lived experiences, professional judgments, and collective responses articulated by teachers and *pesantren* leaders during and after the mentoring process.

One teacher from a participating *pesantren* stated, "For years we understood *nahwu* only as memorization, but this method finally shows us how grammar can directly help students read classical texts." This statement indicates a shift in pedagogical perception, where grammar is no longer viewed as an abstract subject but as a functional tool for reading. The researcher interprets this response as evidence that the ALMA Method addresses a long-standing instructional gap experienced by teachers, particularly the difficulty of translating grammatical knowledge into practical reading skills. The expressed realization reflects acceptance at the cognitive and professional levels, suggesting that the method aligns with teachers' actual instructional needs.

Another informant, who holds a managerial position within the *pesantren*, explained, "We are interested in continuing this program because it fits our *pesantren* identity and helps teachers teach *kitab turats* more confidently." This response highlights institutional-level acceptance rather than individual enthusiasm alone. The researcher interprets this statement as an indication of sustainability potential, as administrative support plays a crucial role in determining whether a pedagogical innovation can be maintained over time. The emphasis on identity suggests that the ALMA Method is perceived not as an external intervention, but as a reinforcement of the *pesantren*'s traditional educational mission.

Observational data during training and mentoring sessions revealed consistent patterns of active participation, prolonged engagement, and voluntary involvement beyond

scheduled activities. Teachers were observed practicing the ALMA steps collaboratively, asking follow-up questions, and requesting additional examples from classical texts. In several locations, informal discussions continued after the sessions ended, indicating sustained interest rather than temporary compliance. Restating these findings, the data show that institutional acceptance of the ALMA Method is manifested through both verbal commitment and observable pedagogical behavior. A clear pattern emerges in which acceptance is closely linked to perceived practicality, alignment with *pesantren* values, and immediate applicability in teaching practice. This pattern supports the conclusion that the ALMA Method possesses substantial potential for long-term integration within *pesantren* instructional systems.

High Effectiveness of the ALMA Method

High effectiveness of the ALMA Method in this study is operationally defined as the observable improvement in teachers' instructional performance when the five-step ALMA framework is applied during training and mentoring sessions. Effectiveness is identified through direct classroom-related practices, including teachers' ability to systematically implement each ALMA step, demonstrate fluency in reading unvowelled classical Arabic texts, and guide learners using syntactic reasoning rather than memorization. This sub-finding emphasizes observable pedagogical actions and performance-based outcomes rather than perceptions or verbal claims, making direct observation the primary source of evidence.

Table 1. Observation-Based Indicators of ALMA Method Effectiveness

Observed Practice	Indicator of Effectiveness
Teachers applied ALMA steps sequentially during practice sessions	Consistent use of the five-step structure without external guidance
Teachers demonstrated reading of classical Arabic texts	Increased fluency and reduced hesitation during text decoding
Teachers analyzed sentence structure while reading.	Accurate identification of syntactic positions and grammatical functions
Teachers guided peers or students using ALMA procedures	Ability to transfer the method through instructional explanation
Teachers completed reading tasks within a limited time	Faster comprehension compared to initial practice sessions
Pretest–posttest documentation review	Increase from the average score of 50.6 to 87.8

The observational data indicate that the ALMA Method yields clear, measurable improvements in instructional performance. Teachers consistently applied the five-step framework in a structured manner, demonstrating smoother reading processes and greater syntactic awareness. The documented increase in pretest–posttest scores further reinforces the observed instructional changes, showing that improved performance was not incidental but aligned with observed practices during training. Restated, the data show that teachers who previously struggled to apply nahwu in reading activities were able to read, analyze, and explain classical texts more effectively after practicing the ALMA Method. These outcomes confirm that the method functions as an effective instructional tool that bridges grammatical knowledge and real-time reading practice.

A clear pattern emerged from the observational data: instructional effectiveness increased as teachers progressed through repeated ALMA practice cycles. Teachers who initially relied on pauses and rule recall gradually shifted toward fluent, step-based reading behavior. The consistency of this pattern across multiple *pesantren* settings suggests that

the effectiveness of the ALMA Method is not dependent on institutional type or teacher background, but on the structured application of its five-step process. This recurring pattern demonstrates that effectiveness is achieved through practice-driven internalization of syntactic reasoning, resulting in faster, more accurate, and more confident reading of classical Arabic texts.

Improving the Ability to Read the Book of Turats

Improvement in *kitab turats* reading competence is operationally defined as a measurable increase in teachers' ability to accurately read and analyze unvowelled classical Arabic texts, as evidenced through documented assessment results. This sub-finding is identified using written pretest and posttest instruments, completed answer sheets, score tables, and archived evaluation records generated during the training and mentoring program. The focus of this finding is not on subjective perception but on empirical documentation of cognitive and performance-based changes before and after the implementation of the ALMA Method.

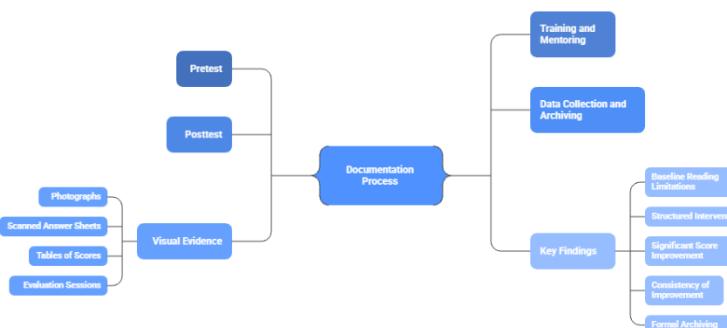


Figure 1. Documentation Process and Visual Evidence

Observation of the documented assessment records shows an apparent increase in performance across participants. Pretest documents indicate frequent errors in syntactic positioning and hesitation in text decoding, while posttest documents demonstrate more accurate sentence parsing and smoother reading flow. The numerical increase in average scores from 50.6 to 87.8 reflects a substantial shift in documented learning outcomes. The researcher interprets these documented changes as evidence that the ALMA Method successfully supports teachers in converting syntactic knowledge into applied reading competence. The consistency between written records and scoring summaries strengthens the credibility of this finding.

Restated, the documentation data show that teachers who initially demonstrated limited ability to read *kitab turats* were able to achieve a high level of reading competence after structured training with the ALMA Method. The improvement is not inferred from opinion or self-report, but directly recorded in written tests, scoring tables, and archived evaluation materials. These documents confirm that learning gains occurred systematically and were captured through formal assessment procedures, making the improvement verifiable and transparent. A consistent pattern emerges from the documentation data: measurable improvement follows structured instructional intervention. Participants showed lower performance at baseline, followed by marked improvement after guided practice using the ALMA framework. This pattern appears uniformly across documented records, indicating that the improvement is not isolated to individual cases but reflects a broader instructional effect. The repetition of this pattern

across assessment documents demonstrates that documented learning gains are closely linked to the structured application of the ALMA Method.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing pedagogical literature emphasizing that instructional acceptance and sustainability are strongly influenced by perceived relevance, practicality, and cultural compatibility of a method. Previous studies on pedagogical innovation in religious and traditional educational institutions suggest that methods perceived as externally imposed or misaligned with institutional identity often face resistance and limited longevity (Arifin et al., 2024; Baharun, 2023; Hina, 2024). In contrast, the present findings demonstrate that the ALMA Method was not only accepted at the individual teacher level but also legitimized at the institutional level, as administrators viewed it as reinforcing, rather than replacing, *pesantren* educational values. This convergence supports the argument that sustainability in faith-based educational settings depends less on methodological novelty and more on alignment with institutional mission and pedagogical tradition.

The observed shift in teachers' pedagogical perception from viewing *nahwu* as abstract memorization to recognizing it as a functional reading tool corresponds with constructivist and applied grammar theories, which argue that grammatical knowledge becomes meaningful when embedded in authentic language use. However, unlike much of the existing literature that focuses on student outcomes, this study extends the discussion by demonstrating how teacher-centered pedagogical transformation serves as a critical entry point for instructional change (Jali, 2025; Munawwaroh, 2024). The ALMA Method appears to function as a mediating framework that translates theoretical grammatical knowledge into actionable instructional practice, addressing a gap frequently noted but rarely resolved in traditional Arabic grammar instruction.

In terms of effectiveness, the findings corroborate prior research highlighting the importance of structured, step-based instructional frameworks in improving language performance (Herlina, 2024; Sain, 2025; Khaer, 2024). The apparent improvement in teachers' observable instructional behavior and reading fluency is consistent with studies suggesting that repeated guided practice and procedural clarity enhance skill acquisition. What distinguishes this study is the triangulation of observation and documentation, showing that effectiveness is not merely perceived but demonstrably reflected in improved performance metrics. The substantial increase in documented pretest–posttest scores strengthens claims that pedagogical effectiveness can be empirically verified even within traditionally qualitative learning environments such as *pesantren* (Heru, 2024; Qushwa, 2024).

The documentation-based improvement in *kitab turats* reading competence aligns with assessment-oriented literature advocating the integration of traditional learning contexts with systematic evaluation mechanisms. While some scholars caution that formal testing may be incompatible with classical religious education, the present findings suggest otherwise (Abdullah, 2024; Aziz, 2025; Widiasari, 2024). The documented gains indicate that assessment, when aligned with instructional goals and pedagogical processes, can serve as a legitimate and credible tool for measuring learning outcomes without undermining traditional educational values. This finding challenges assumptions that *pesantren* learning outcomes are inherently difficult to document or standardize.

Theoretically, this study contributes to pedagogical sustainability discourse by

demonstrating how acceptance, effectiveness, and documented outcomes form an integrated cycle rather than isolated dimensions. Practically, the findings imply that *pesantren* and similar institutions can adopt innovative instructional methods without sacrificing identity, provided that the methods are perceived as practical, culturally resonant, and pedagogically empowering. The ALMA Method offers a replicable model for bridging grammatical theory and classical text reading, suggesting broader applicability for Arabic instruction in other traditional and semi-formal educational settings. Together, these implications position the ALMA Method not only as an effective instructional strategy but also as a sustainable pedagogical innovation within Islamic education systems.

CONCLUSION / الخلاصة

This study demonstrates that the ALMA Method offers an effective and sustainable solution to long-standing challenges in teaching and learning *kitab turats* within Islamic boarding schools. The most critical finding lies in the integration of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: institutional acceptance, pedagogical effectiveness, and documented improvement in reading competence. The research reveals that rapid progress in reading ability is achievable not merely through intensified grammatical instruction, but through a structured, functional, and practice-oriented approach that directly links syntax to text interpretation. A key lesson from this study is that pedagogical change in *pesantren* contexts is most successful when innovation aligns with institutional identity and teachers' lived instructional realities. The ALMA Method does not disrupt traditional learning values; instead, it revitalizes them by transforming *nahwu* from abstract memorization into an operational reading tool. This finding underscores the importance of contextualized pedagogy in preserving religious literacy while responding to contemporary educational demands.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to Islamic education research by providing empirical evidence that pedagogical sustainability emerges from the convergence of acceptance, effectiveness, and measurable outcomes. Methodologically, it strengthens the use of qualitative action research combined with documentation-based assessment in *pesantren* studies, an area often perceived as resistant to formal evaluation. Nevertheless, this research has limitations. The study focuses primarily on teacher performance rather than long-term student outcomes, and the research duration does not capture extended curricular integration. Future research is therefore encouraged to examine longitudinal impacts on student literacy, comparative effectiveness across regions, and the adaptability of the ALMA Method in non-*pesantren* Arabic learning environments. Such studies would further validate the scalability and broader pedagogical relevance of the ALMA Method.

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