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Syntactic Errors in Arabic Grammar Learning: A Qualitative Analysis of Eighth-Grade Students at MTs Attanwir Bojonegoro

Jauharotun Ni'mah[1], Ulita Sari[2], Nafiul Farist[3], Bagus Agung Prayoga[4], Ismail[5]

[1]STAINU Madiun; Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro; [2,3,4]Institut Attanwir Bojonegoro, Indonesia, [5]Al-Fursan International School, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: ulitasari2@gmail.com

Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study identifies and explains syntactic errors in Arabic grammar (nahwu) learning among eighth-grade students in class VIII C2 at MTs Attanwir Bojonegoro. Data were collected from exercises completed by ten female students, alongside classroom observation, interviews, and documentation. Errors appeared in the construction of nominal and verbal sentences, the assignment of case endings to direct objects, and the grammatical analysis (i'rāb) of sentence elements. The findings indicate that limited vocabulary, insufficient mastery of foundational nahwu rules, and lack of careful attention during exercises contributed to the errors. The study proposes more engaging teaching activities, increased motivation, and regular written and oral practice to help students apply grammatical rules accurately.

Keywords: *Arabic grammar; nahwu; syntactic errors; error analysis; secondary education*

A. Introduction

Foreign-language learning presents challenges in mastering both communication and formal language rules. In Indonesia, Arabic is taught in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools, where students are expected to learn vocabulary and grammatical structures. Arabic grammar comprises morphology (ṣarf) and syntax (nahwu), both of which support the interpretation and construction of meaningful sentences.

Arabic has distinctive morphological and syntactic systems. Morphology concerns word forms and changes, including verbal distinctions in tense and aspect, whereas syntax concerns relations among words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Nahwu describes how Arabic words function within a sentence and how their final forms are determined through i'rāb or binā' (Natsir et al., 2020).

Students often find nahwu difficult because instruction involves theoretical explanations followed by oral and written exercises. Errors arise when learners cannot apply sentence patterns, identify grammatical functions, or assign appropriate word endings. Successful teaching therefore requires preparation by both teachers and students. As Faizin (2024) shows through a comparison of Arabic grammar textbooks, the selection and use of instructional materials are relevant considerations in grammar education; Destiana and Aqil (2024) similarly address efforts to make Arabic grammar more accessible.

At MTs Attanwir Bojonegoro, beginner nahwu instruction uses the first volumes of Al-Nahw al-Wadih. In early January 2022, exercises administered to eighth-grade students revealed difficulty arranging jumbled words into a correct verbal clause. For example, the appropriate sequence تَجْرِي السَّفِينَةُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ places the verb before its subject, whereas students sometimes produced different orders without correctly analyzing the resulting sentence structure. This study describes the observed error patterns and proposes corrections.

B. Method

The study used qualitative descriptive field research in class VIII C2 at MTs Attanwir Bojonegoro. Ten female students who had already received instruction in foundational nahwu were selected for examination. Data were collected through observations, interviews, documentation, and responses to grammar exercises. The analysis involved reviewing the responses, identifying

recurring errors, interpreting them against established grammatical rules, and drawing conclusions after repeated examination of the data (Moleong, 2012).

Errors were examined by comparison with grammatical explanations and examples in Al-Nahw al-Wadih (Al-Jarim & Amin, 2005). The aim was to characterize the errors made in this local learning context rather than estimate their prevalence among all eighth-grade learners.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Error Analysis and Arabic Syntax

Error analysis is concerned with the language forms produced by learners. The source manuscript discusses Corder's distinction among lapses, errors, and mistakes. Lapses involve unintended slips in speaking or writing; systematic errors reflect limitations in linguistic competence; and mistakes may arise when a learner fails to apply a known rule in a particular instance. Distinguishing these categories can help educators interpret learner responses (Tarigan & Tarigan, 2011).

Syntax, derived from Greek elements meaning "together" and "arrange," concerns how words combine into phrases and sentences. In Arabic, a nominal sentence (jumlah ismiyyah) commonly consists of a mubtada' and khabar, whereas a verbal sentence (jumlah fi'liyyah) begins with a verb (fi'l) and typically includes a subject (fā'il) and may include a direct object (maf'ūl bih). Correct i'rāb requires identifying these elements and selecting appropriate case endings.

The original discussion identifies verb types as fi'l māḍī (past), fi'l muḍāri' (present or future), and fi'l amr (imperative). A fā'il is ordinarily nominative (marfū'), while a direct object is accusative (manṣūb). Learners need these distinctions to analyze sentences such as يَبِيعُ الْقَصَّابُ اللَّحْمَ and قَرَأَ مُحَمَّدٌ الْقُرْآنَ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ.

2. Factors Associated with Syntactic Errors

Three reported factors contributed to the students' difficulties. First, limited vocabulary made it difficult for them to understand the meanings of words in the exercises. Second, insufficient understanding of foundational nahwu rules led to errors in sentence construction and grammatical classification. Third, limited attention and care when completing exercises led to incorrect responses

even where rules had been introduced. These factors suggest that grammar practice must be supported by vocabulary development, conceptual understanding, and careful review.

3. Errors in Nominal Sentence Agreement

The first category involved incorrect agreement between subjects and predicates or verbs in number and gender. When two masculine subjects are mentioned, the verbal form in the examined example should be dual; and when the subject is Maryam, the feminine verbal prefix is required. The original examples are preserved in the table.

Table 1. Errors and Corrections in Nominal Sentence Structures

No.	Student response / error	Corrected form
1.	إبْراهِيم وَ فُلان يأكُلُ الشّاةَ	إبراهيم وَ فُلان يَأكُلَانِ الشّاةَ
2.	مَريَم يَشْرَبُ الْماءَ	مَريَم تَشْرَبُ الْماءَ

In the first example, the form يأكُلُ was corrected to يَأكُلَانِ to agree with the two male participants named in the source sentence. In the second example, يَشْرَبُ was replaced with تَشْرَبُ to agree with the feminine referent مَرْيَم. These examples illustrate difficulties in applying number and gender agreement.

4. Errors in Verbal Sentence Construction

Other responses incorrectly arranged words in sentences intended to follow the verbal-sentence pattern. The corrections place the verb at the beginning of the relevant construction, followed by its grammatical subject, consistent with the target examples provided in the learning material.

Table 2. Errors and Corrections in Verbal Sentence Construction

No.	Student response / error	Corrected form
1.	مُحَمَّدٌ يَحْمِلُ الكِتابَ	يَحْمِلُ مُحَمَّدٌ الكِتابَ
2.	قبل الأكل اَغْسَلَ يديك و بعده	اَغْسِلْ يديك قبل الأكل و بعده

5. Incorrect Case Endings on Direct Objects

Students also made mistakes in assigning the final vowel to the direct object. In examples involving milk, meat, and a sheep, the object should be marked with the accusative ending rather than a nominative or genitive ending. In the following table the original Arabic examples are preserved.

Table 3. Errors and Corrections in Direct-Object Case Marking

Error	Corrected form
يَشْرَبُ مُحَمَّدٌ اللَّبَنُ	يَشْرَبُ مُحَمَّدٌ اللَّبَنَ
يَبِيعُ القَصَّابُ اللَّحمِ	يَبِيعُ القَصَّابُ اللَّحمَ
إبراهيم وَ فُلان يَأْكُلَانِ الشَّاةُ	إبراهيم وَ فُلان يَأْكُلَانِ الشَّاةَ

6. Errors in Grammatical Parsing (I'rāb)

In يَبِيعُ الْقَصَّابُ اللَّحْمَ, some learners classified يَبِيعُ as a direct object even though it is a present-tense verb. They also misidentified الْقَصَّابُ, which functions as the subject, and described اللَّحْمَ merely as a noun without recognizing its function as a direct object. Accurate parsing requires specifying the grammatical role, not only a broad word class.

In قَرَأَ مُحَمَّدٌ الْقُرْآنَ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ, errors included misclassifying the past-tense verb قَرَأَ as a present-tense verb, failing to recognize مُحَمَّدٌ as the subject, and failing to identify الْقُرْآنَ as the direct object. Some learners also classified الْمَسْجِدِ as an imperative verb, although it is a genitive noun following the preposition فِي. These patterns suggest gaps in recognition of verbal categories, argument structure, and prepositional case assignment.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The study recommends more engaging learning activities, explicit motivation to learn nahwu, and frequent exercises. Varied instructional media may increase interest in a topic commonly viewed as difficult. Repetition through individual and group activities, as well as written and oral tasks, can help learners recognize recurring constructions and correct their own responses. Research on virtual recitation in nahwu instruction (Akmalia & Faizin, 2021) provides another example of pedagogical variation, although it addresses a different setting.

D. Conclusion

The syntactic errors observed among ten female students in class VIII C2 at MTs Attanwir Bojonegoro concerned word order, agreement, final vowel marking, and grammatical parsing. Contributing factors included limited Arabic vocabulary, incomplete mastery of basic nahwu rules, and insufficient interest or attention. Teaching strategies that combine explicit grammatical explanation, motivating activities, and repeated practice may help address these errors. The findings are descriptive and should not be interpreted as representative of students beyond the studied class.

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