

Enhancing students' understanding of Arabic syntax on high school students in Indonesia

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Abstract

Understanding the concept of Arabic syntax is a learning problem faced by the students. For that reason, this study aims to improve students' understanding of Arabic syntax. This study employed action research design by presenting six critical-reflective steps in efforts to improve students' understanding of Arabic syntax at a junior high school in West Java, Indonesia. Data were collected using interviews, observations, surveys, oral and written tests. The findings revealed that the understanding of Arabic syntax for first-year high school students regarding noun, verb, particle and sentence material improved well. This study confirms that through a series of critical-reflective steps, the students' understanding of the concept of Arabic syntax can be improved.

Keywords: Arabic Syntax, Arabic Learning, Non-native Speaker, Foreign Language

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1. Introduction

Among the problems encountered by junior high school students in West Java Province, Indonesia, lies the lacking understanding of the concept of Arabic Syntax, in contrast to the fact that mastering the concept of Arabic syntax is one of the linguistic skills the students must possess. Not mastering the concept of syntax will potentially bring about difficulties in understanding Arabic texts and composing sentences with correct Arabic grammar. Mastery of Arabic grammar, which includes syntax and morphology, is essential prior to understanding Arabic sentences (Wahyono, 2019). A study concerning Arabic Learning intended for non-native speakers suggested that the students find it challenging to learn Arabic language with its set of skills (Dajani et al., 2014). Research about learning Arabic, specifically its syntactic concepts have been conducted, however up to this point the topic remains a problem faced by students. It appears that the correlation between syntax and word formation continues to be the hottest topic in which many linguistic arguments arose (Spencer & Zwicky, 1998).

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Arabic Syntax

Arabic syntax, also referred to as Arabic grammar, plays a pivotal role in learning Arabic language (Arifianto, 2021; Hamid et al., 2020; Shaalan et al., 2015), and the ability to operate grammatical structures of a language is called syntactic awareness (Brimo, 2015; Khodeir et al., 2017; Layton et al., 1998; Peake et al., 2014). Verb and noun phrases, conjunctions, prepositions, adjectives, possessions, specifications, conditions and relative clauses are covered in Arabic syntax (Kadir et al., 2014; Mustapha et al., 2013). A thorough research is deemed necessary concerning Arabic existential sentence and its syntax and semantics (Alharbi, 2017; Camilleri & Sadler, 2019). Syntax describes how sentences are constructed from a sequence of words. Addressing the relation between words in a sentence, labels are used for each word with a syntactic function relationship, namely subject, predicate, object, description, complement, etc. (Ramdiani, 2014).

1.1.2. The Problems of Learning Arabic Syntax

The fact shows that many problems are encountered when learning syntax, for instance in understanding Arabic clauses. A complex problem emerges as the Arabic simple clause is sentential negation (Aoun et al., 2010), combined with linguistic problems, that include phonetics, morphology, and syntax, non-linguistic problems, that include learning motivation, learning tools, teaching methods, learning time, and learning environment (Fahrurrozi, 2014). According to Tong et al. (2013), ones with poor comprehension skill have troubles with both morphological and syntactic awareness. In addition, a research conducted by Nurdianto (2020) focusing on syntax also suggested that when it comes to learning syntax, the students find the process challenging with the gradual knowledge over the course of time. Grammatical errors, word vocalizations, and constructions of sentences occurred in the process, as the three main aspects closely connected to understanding syntax and morphology (Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017). A research added that inefficient syntactic teaching methods should be removed and instead encouraging students' participation by providing the opportunities (Masboogh et al., 2019). Exercises are instructed for students with linguistic problems to boost their linguistic competence; while motivation, feedback, and assistance are intended for those with non-linguistic problems, to direct their perspective towards Arabic learning as a fun process (Istiqomah & Mahliatussikah, 2019).

1.1.3. Arabic Syntax Learning for High School Students in Indonesia

Syntax materials in Senior High Schools in Indonesia begins with simple word subjects about noun, verb, and particle (Rahmat & Abdurrahman, 2017). Arabic noun is a word that shows independent meaning without the meaning of time. In Indonesia, junior high school students are required to understand the materials in terms of gender, namely masculine and feminine. In Arabic, all nouns are masculine, if not feminine (Rizal, 2020). Arabic verb is a word that shows independent meaning within the meaning of time. Materials regarding verbs to be mastered by junior high school students in Indonesia include perfective verbs and imperfective verbs. Next, Arabic particle is a meaningless word

unless it is paired with other word/s (Rahmat & Abdurrahman, 2017). Materials regarding particles intended for the first-year high school students focuses on particles related to prepositions. The preposition appears preceding a noun, assigning the noun into the genitive case (major) (Najjar, 2020). Additionally, they study about sentence. Sentence learning includes nominal sentences, namely sentences that begin with nouns; and verbal sentences, namely sentences that begin with verbs (Alduais, 2012).

1.2. Related Research

A recent research conducted by Rahman et al. (2021) revealed that a strong mastery of syntax and morphology enables students to get a proper understanding of the language and smooth writing of Arabic text. Then, research conducted by El-Omari and Bataineh (2018) regarding the problems of learning Arabic faced by non-Arabic speaking children claimed that the most important thing in learning Arabic is to make students understand phonetic, syntactic, morphological, lexical models, and semantics. However, these two studies have not presented critical-reflective steps that can be applied in learning Arabic. In addition, a research conducted by Ardiansyah and Muhammad (2020) regarding the implementation of a syntactic and morphological curriculum in a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in West Java, Indonesia, has not provided a fairly complex discussion of its components. Other researchers also claimed that researches in the field of Arabic learning, including syntactic materials, were still very much needed (Alothman & Alsalman, 2020; Solyman et al., 2020).

According to findings of previous researches, the researchers considered it important to examine aspects related to improving students' understanding of Arabic syntax. This research carried out practical steps as concrete solutions that Arabic language teachers can apply during learning activities as an attempt to attain learning objectives with optimum results. In this research, syntax covers four aspects, namely noun, verb, particle, and sentence. This research is expected to help Arabic language teachers and students in improving the quality of learning syntax in particular, and Arabic in general. Thus, this research focuses on improving the students' understanding of Arabic syntax in junior high school in Tasikmalaya, West Java Province, Indonesia.

1.3. Purpose of The Study

This study aims at improving students' understanding of Arabic syntax by implementing some critical-reflective steps. In line with the purpose of the study, this article seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Why do high school students not quite understand Arabic syntax?
2. Are high school students aware of the importance of understanding Arabic syntax?
3. What critical-reflective steps can be taken in order to improve the understanding of Arabic syntax for high school students?
4. Can a series of critical-reflective steps improve the understanding of Arabic syntax for high school students?

2. Method and Materials

2.1. Research Design

This research employed action research design that is popularly used in the field of learning. As a form of professional learning, its popularity continues to rise globally (Shallow et al., 2018; Smith & Sela, 2005; Supriyadi & Julia, 2019; Winter, 1998). Researches employing action research design are aimed at improving the learning quality as well as reflecting pedagogical solutions. In this research, the problem stems from the lack of understanding of first-year high school students on the concept of Arabic syntax, therefore appropriate steps to improve the quality of the learning process must be taken, and action research design has the apt methodology to improve the understanding of first-year high school students on the concept of Arabic syntax. It provides opportunities for teachers to be the "researchers"

as well as learners through the enhancement of instructional practices and reflection on pedagogical decisions (Calhoun, 2002).

2.2. Research Procedures

This research was conducted in three main stages, comprising six sub-stages in action, similar to an action research design conducted by previous researchers (Julia et al., 2019; Julia et al., 2020; Lloyd, 2002; Ponte et al., 2004; Smith & Leonard, 2014; Supriyadi et al., 2020). The first stage was allotted for a survey, pre-test, and preliminary analysis of the participants' skills and perceptions regarding learning Arabic syntax. The second stage was intended for the implementation of actions according to the plan, followed by reflection in each action. This stage resulted in six critical-reflective steps in efforts to assist students in understanding the Arabic syntactic concept. The third stage was assigned for a final test with the purpose to identify changes in participants' understanding of Arabic syntax.

2.3. The Collaborative Aspect

A key aspect to organize in action research is collaboration. The ethos of collaboration in action research becomes especially important (Bednarz, 2007; Carboni et al., 2012; Cardno, 2006). Collaborations in many different areas are encouraged by schools, from grade-level meetings, departmental meetings, field trip organization, school site councils, discussion between colleagues or specialists, and curriculum planning, and so on and so forth (Miltenienė, 2012; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). In this research, the researchers collaborated with a number of colleagues who were teacher members of the Arabic Teacher Working Group at a High School in Tasikmalaya, West Java Province, Indonesia. The teachers revealed that their students had difficulties when learning Arabic syntax. Thereafter, the researchers and colleagues agreed to take steps that can be applied in the learning process as a solution to these problems. Together with these colleagues, the researchers developed the requirements to be prepared for the implementation of the project. An agreement was also made to develop research instruments and plan learning steps. Furthermore, researchers also collaborated with other subject teachers who were experts in technology and information in preparing teaching materials. In this research, researchers asked for advice in preparing e-learning based teaching materials for more attractive and interactive teaching materials. Researchers and colleagues agreed that the result of this project is that students can improve their understanding of Arabic syntactic concepts.

2.4. Research Site and Subject

This research was conducted on first-year students in one of the senior high schools in West Java Province, Indonesia, with the total of 63 students. There were 27 (42.9%) male students and 36 (57.1%) female students with an age range of 15-18 years. Participants came from various regions in Indonesia, including 50 (79.4%) students from Tasikmalaya, one (1.6%) student from Purwakarta, one (1.6%) student from Bekasi, one (1.6%) student from Ciamis, two (3.2%) students from Majalengka, four (6.3%) students from Bandung, one (1.6%) student from Cimahi, one (1.6%) student from Bogor, one (1.6%) student from Samarinda and one (1.6%) student from East Kotawaringin. All students agreed to take part in this research and gave their permission to the researchers to use their information as research data.

2.5. Data Collection Tools

The survey process was initiated by preparing instruments related to understanding Arabic syntax, Arabic learning background, and students' perspectives on Arabic lessons. The survey was conducted using Google Forms. This was done because surveys using digital technology are more efficient than the traditional ones (Schneider & Harknett, 2022). Furthermore, during observation, the researchers observed the students' behavior in following a series of critical-reflective steps. In the process, the author made careful observations and noted important things that happened during the learning process. The results of the observations were used for reflection of the learning activities.

Following that, the researchers prepared several questions to evaluate the students. These questions were in line with the materials that has been given during the research, namely about verbs, nouns, particles, nominal sentences, and verbal sentences. Finally, in the interview process, the researchers prepared a question instrument to identify the students' opinions regarding each of the critical-reflective step. This instrument includes questions about whether the students faced any obstacles during the series of critical-reflective steps and whether their understanding of Arabic syntactic concepts improved after the steps were implemented. The results of the interview were recorded for reflection. Interviewing is assumed to broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena, as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

2.6. Data Collection Process

In this research, the data were obtained through surveys, tests, open interviews, and observations. The survey was conducted to determine the extent to which students' knowledge related to Arabic syntax material. The survey was conducted by means of Google Form using a Likert scale and a Gutman scale. Google Form is a survey tool that facilitates researchers in diverse scientific fields (Bondarchuk et al., 2020; Hallur, 2016; MM et al., 2020). Then, students were also asked to do pre-test and post-test about nouns, verbs, particles, and sentence materials. Furthermore, during the research, students were also asked to take an oral exam. The knowledge test was conducted by utilizing Google Forms, while an oral test was directly conducted in the classroom. Additionally, observations were also done in each learning step. Next, the students were also asked open-ended questions.

2.7. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using two approaches, namely qualitative and quantitative approaches. A qualitative approach was used to analyze the results of interviews, surveys, observations, and written tests. The analysis is done by making categorization, percentage, and interpreting the data. Meanwhile, analysis in the quantitative approach was carried out to analyze the results of the written test. Quantitative analysis was assisted by using StatPlus software to analyze the difference in the mean results of the pre-test and post-test through Compare Two Related Samples test (Sign Test).

3. Results

Pre-Action Analysis

To identify students' knowledge of Arabic syntax, it is necessary to conduct an initial analysis through a survey. The survey results as displayed in Table 1 reveals that of all students (n = 63, 100%), the majority of students claimed to have learned Arabic syntax (n = 47, 73.4%), familiar with the term noun (n = 51, 79.7%), were familiar with the term verb (n = 54, 84.4%), were familiar with the term particle (n = 34, 53.1%), were familiar with the terms verbal sentences and nominal sentences (n = 41, 64.1%), were able to read Arabic text (n = 61 (95.3%), and were able to make sentences according to the Arabic syntax rules (n = 44, 68.8%). Table 1 shows that the majority of students had already understood Arabic syntax. However, this data was not yet proven by giving questions directly, so the real understanding of students had not been tested.

Table 1. Initial Knowledge of Arabic Syntax

Initial knowledge of Arabic syntax	Yes	No
Have you ever learned Arabic syntax?	47	17
Do you know the meaning of a noun?	51	13
Do you know the meaning of a verb?	54	10
Do you know the meaning of a particle?	34	30
Do you know the meanings of nominal sentences dan verbal sentences?	41	23
Can you read Arabic text fluently?	61	3
Can you make a sentence using correct use of Arabic grammar?	44	20

To prove whether the survey results were directly proportional to the students' understanding, an initial test regarding Arabic syntax materials was conducted. The students were required to work on 7

practice questions about nouns, verbs, particles, and sentence materials. The results of the initial test are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Knowledge of Arabic Syntax

Students' knowledge of Arabic syntax	Incorrect Answers		Correct Answers	
	Total	%	Total	%
Definition of noun	21	33.33	42	66.67
Division of nouns by type	33	52.38	30	47.62
Definition of verb	24	38.10	39	61.90
Division of verbs by time	49	77.78	14	22.22
Definition of particle	44	69.84	19	30.16
Definition of nominal sentences	38	60.32	25	39.68
Definition of verbal sentences	38	60.32	25	39.68

It can be established from Table 2 that the majority of students (n = 33, 52.38%) did not know about the division of nouns by type. It is also acquired that the majority of students (n = 49, 77.78%) did not know the division of verbs based on the time of occurrence. Furthermore, the results also show that the majority of students (n = 44, 69.84%) were unable to define what a particle was. The majority of students (n = 38, 60.32%) were still unable to define nominal sentences, and the majority of them (n = 38, 60.32%) were also unable to define verbal sentences according to Arabic rules. Following this identification of students' understanding of Arabic syntax based on their knowledge, students were later assigned to fill out a survey to rate statements on a scale of 1-5 (Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree).

Table 3. Perceptions on Learning Arabic Syntax

Statements regarding understanding Arabic syntax	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
High school students must master Arabic syntax	1		2	32	29
High school students need proper steps from the teacher in learning Arabic syntax	2		2	32	28
High school students did not acquire sufficient understanding of Arabic syntax in previous schools		5	14	36	9

From Table 3, it can be identified that the majority of students agree (n = 32, 50%) and strongly agree (n = 29, 45.3%) with the statement that students in high school must master Arabic syntax. Positive responses were also obtained as the students agree (n = 32, 50%) and strongly agree (n = 28, 43.8%) with the statement that students needed proper steps from the teacher in learning Arabic syntax. Finally, students disagree (n = 14 21.9%) and agree (n = 36, 56.3%) that they did not acquire sufficient understanding of Arabic syntax in their previous schools.

The students' statements illustrate the need to improve their understanding of Arabic syntax, hence it is important for them to get proper learning steps in the classroom. For that reason, it is necessary to implement several activities to help students improve their understanding of Arabic syntax.

The Action of Making the Students Understand the Concept of Arabic Syntax

Pre-action analysis has resulted in six learning stages to improve the understanding of the concept of Arabic syntax. These six stages also involve critical-reflective and practical steps in each implementation. The following is the application of the six stages in which each stage was supplemented by in-depth observations and students' feedback.

Step 1: Stimulating Students' Motivation to Learn Arabic Syntax

In this step, students were given motivations to pique their interest in learning Arabic. Students were encouraged to love Arabic as a language that is useful for religion, humans, and civilization, both in the

past and until the end of life. Students are given the notion that learning Arabic is learning to use the language, it functions beyond learning the meaning of translation of Arabic language. For that, all forms of materials including Arabic syntax must be mastered as a tool to deepen the knowledge of Arabic language. As a result, students become more aware of the urgency of learning Arabic syntax.

Step 2: Sorting more Practical, Effective and Efficient Materials

What was done in this step simplifying the word form. This simplification means avoiding and even removing things that are less functional or less frequent in use. The chosen word construct should be functional in both spoken and written language. For instance, in learning about verbs, both perfective and imperfective, many examples are taken from three-letter root words that are often found in reading texts. Figure 1 presents examples of perfective and imperfective verbs that can be used in learning.

Perfective	Imperfective
قَرَأَ read.past 'He read'	يَقْرَأُ read.present 'He reads'
كَتَبَ write.past 'He wrote'	يَكْتُبُ write.present 'He writes'
دَرَسَ study.past 'He studied'	يُدْرَسُ study.present 'He studies'
رَسَمَ draw.past 'He drew'	يُرْسِمُ draw.present 'He draws'

Figure 1. Examples of Perfective dan Imperfective Verb

It can be inferred in Figure 1 that the perfective verb is used to refer to the past and the imperfective verb is used to refer to the present. In other cases, imperfective verbs can also be used to refer to the future when complemented with another particle. The researcher explained these to the students. Then, in providing materials about nouns, vocabulary with the themes related to the students' daily lives were taught, for example themes about family members, home, hobbies, school and so on. Meanwhile, materials about particles were delivered by giving examples of their application in sentences. This was done so that students could understand better in terms of using these particles rather than just knowing the types. During sentence learning, the researcher asked the students a question "Do you know what is meant by nominal sentences?", a student answered "sentences composed of a subject and a predicate". The researcher went on with another question, "Do you know what is meant by verbal sentences?", a student answered "sentences composed of a verb and a subject". Next, the researcher asked the two students to give an example of a nominal sentence, they answered '*Zaydun qâ'imun/Zayd is standing*'. When the researcher asked them to come up with another example, neither of them could answer. Furthermore, when the researcher asked the two students to give examples of verbal sentences, both answered '*qâma Zaydun/Zayd stood*' and they could not provide more examples.

The results of the initial test revealed that the majority of students did not know what constructed nominal sentences and verbal sentences, their lack of enthusiasm when answering questions from the teacher also gave a hint that that the majority of them had not mastered the materials. As for those who already understand the materials regarding sentences, they struggled when being asked to construct different sentence patterns. The researchers further asked that question again, regarding why they could not come up with more varied examples of sentences. Students argued that the sample sentences were given by an Arabic teacher in the previous level and they were not required to construct patterns of nominal sentences and other verbal sentences. Referring to further observations, the results showed that the majority of students who already understood the materials about sentences were taught the same sentence examples by Arabic teachers in previous schools, and the sample sentences

were taken from Arabic textbooks that were extensively used in Indonesia. Hence, to tackle this problem, researchers designed further steps in form of providing challenges in learning activities.

Step 3: Providing Challenges to Solve Problems

This step began with providing a stimulus to the students. This was intended to establish the same perception of the learning materials among students. The researcher explained that in Arabic there are two types of sentences, namely nominal sentences and verbal sentences. Nominal sentences begin with a noun, with its construction comprising a subject and a predicate. Meanwhile, verbal sentences begin with a verb, with its construction comprising a verb and a subject. These two types of sentences distinguish Arabic language from other languages. Additionally, students were frequently given a pattern of nominal and verbal sentences, with a variety of forms and models, then proceeded with training them with various construction patterns. This step was taken as a follow-up action to the problems that ensued in the previous stage. In this step, students are challenged to change nominal sentences into verbal sentences or vice versa. Figure 2 presents examples of verbal sentences and nominal sentences that can be used in learning.

Verbal Sentences	Nominal Sentences	
يَأْكُلُ مُحَمَّدٌ التَّفَاحَةَ	مُحَمَّدٌ يَأْكُلُ التَّفَاحَةَ	'Muhammad eats/is eating the apple'
تَرَسُمُ عَائِشَةُ الْمَنَاطِرَ	عَائِشَةُ تَرَسُمُ الْمَنَاطِرَ	'Aisha draws/is drawing scenery'
يَقْرَأُ الطُّلَابُ الْكُتُبَ	الطُّلَابُ يَقْرَأُونَ الْكُتُبَ	'Male students read/are reading books'
تَقْرَأُ الطَّالِبَاتُ الْكُتُبَ	الطَّالِبَاتُ يَقْرَأْنَ الْكُتُبَ	'Female students read/are reading books'

Figure 2. Examples of Verbal and Nominal Sentences

From Figure 2 we can grasp that verbal and nominal sentences differ in structures despite the same translation. The students' ability to determine whether an Arabic sentence is nominal or verbal highly depends on the ability of these students to distinguish between nouns and verbs in a sentence. Therefore, the previous stage in which the students were introduced to nouns and verbs plays a vital role in achieving the learning targets at this stage. Afterwards, the researchers asked for feedback from students regarding the learning activities that had been carried out. One student claimed that it was easier for him to understand the materials when he knew the purpose of the materials himself, compared to repetition and rote learning methods that were absent of his understanding regarding what he was learning. However, another student argued that the materials concerning sentences, including nominal and verbal sentences, had various patterns so that it took quite a while to understand them. Further observations revealed that the lack of understanding among the majority of students regarding the formation of nominal and verbal sentences was due to the absence of these sentence patterns in Indonesian language. Thus, to provide more thorough understanding for students, we designed a follow-up action utilizing technology as a learning resource and learning communication.

Step 4: Utilizing Technology as a Learning Resource and Learning Communication

During this step, students were assigned to participate in e-learning based activity. Among the applications used were Google Classroom, Kahoot, and Quizziz. In e-learning, students were given supplementary materials in addition to what was given in class about nouns, verbs, particles and sentences. Furthermore, students were also assigned to take interactive quizzes to make learning fun. Quizzes in e-learning were designed in such a way as to spark the students' enthusiasm throughout the learning process. Each question in the quiz was set with a time limit to train students to be disciplined even during online learning. Furthermore, students were also admitted in discussion groups using WhatsApp application. This was due to the fact that WhatsApp is a popular application used by diverse groups of people in Indonesia. Discussions in WhatsApp groups serve to establish an effective communication regarding learning or counseling outside of class hours. Using an online dictionary was also recommended, such as *Al-Ma'ani* which can be downloaded from Play Store to look up vocabulary that they found unfamiliar. Thus, the use of the dictionary smoothed the process for students to compose nominal and verbal sentences, or translate these sentences.

One of the setbacks at this stage was that not all students played an active role in discussions. The researcher inquired one of the students who had never participated in discussion activities, and the student admitted that he did not have an internet data quota, resulting in passiveness in discussion forums. The absence of some students' participations in discussion forums made it difficult for researchers to analyze the extent of their understanding of the learning materials studied at school. Researchers asked for feedback to another student in relation to e-learning based learning activities that had been implemented, one of the students responded that the class atmosphere became more fun and not monotonous with the technology-based learning and quizzes. However, there were also students who complained about the time limit for each question presented in the e-learning quiz as they needed a relatively long time to understand each item because they were not used to using e-learning applications. Furthermore, to find out the extent of students' understanding of the Arabic syntax materials, the implementation of the next step becomes necessary, namely an oral test regarding the Arabic syntax materials.

Step 5: Oral Test

The students were given an oral test individually. The questions asked covered Arabic syntax learning materials, namely nouns, verbs, particles and sentences. This was intended to find out the extent of students' understanding following the implementation of the previous learning steps. In addition, this test was also conducted to build students' readiness prior to the final test, namely the written test. The results of the oral test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' Understanding of Arabic Syntax (Orally)

Students' understanding of Arabic syntax (orally)	Incorrect answers		Correct Answers	
	Total	%	Total	%
What do you know about the difference between masculine and feminine nouns?	9	14.29	54	85.71
What do you know about the use of imperfective and perfective verbs?	13	20.63	50	79.37
Mention at least 3 particles that you know	5	7.94	58	92.06
What do you know about the difference between nominal and verbal sentences?	7	11.11	56	88.89

From Table 4, it is revealed that the majority of students ($n = 58, 92.06$) already mastered materials about particles, and the lowest percentage ($n = 50, 79.37$) was concerning the aspect of understanding verb materials. Following further inspection, it turned out that students were still frequently mistaken in distinguishing perfective verbs and imperfective verbs. This finding certainly could not be ignored. Again, the researchers gave some comprehensible elucidation to the students who were not yet able to explain the use of perfective verbs and imperfective verbs. These oral test results indicated that there were gaps in students' understanding of syntactic materials, hence during the oral test the researchers also played the role as tutors in providing explanation regarding materials that students still failed to understand. Next, the researcher asked for feedback from the students who had taken the oral test. One student claimed that this oral test served as a common ground for the teacher and students in knowing about the extent of students' understanding of the Arabic syntax materials. Another student stated that the number of incorrect answers in the oral test was influenced by the lack of students' preparation of students as well as mental unreadiness so that they forgot the materials that they had memorized. Therefore, in order to get more complex results, in the next step the students were assigned to work on written questions covering Arabic syntax materials.

Step 6: Written Test

The written test was the final of a series of steps that had been taken in the process of improving students' syntactic understanding. In this test, the students were assigned to do an exercise comprising seven questions. These questions consisted of five multiple choice questions and two short answer questions, covering materials on nouns (including masculine and feminine), materials on verbs

(including perfective and imperfective), materials on particles, and materials on nominal sentences and verbal sentences. The form of the questions in the written test is depicted in Figure 3.

اخترْ اصحَّ الإجابة بوضع علامة الضرب من "أ" أو "ب" أو "ج" أو "د" أو "هـ" في ورقة الإجابة!
'Choose the correct answer by placing a multiplication mark from "a", "b", "c", "d" or "e" on the answer sheet!'

1. إسماعيل... هو يتعلم في المدرسة الثانوية الإسلامية الحكومية
 'Ismael is a ..., he is studying at the Islamic State High School'
 ا. طبيب ب. طالب ج. مدرس د. تاجر هـ. فلاح
 e. 'farmer' d. 'seller' c. 'teacher' b. 'student' a. 'doctor'

2. لحيّة ... هي قادمة من مكاسر سولاويسي الجنوبيّة
 'Hilya has a..., she comes from Makassar, South Sulawesi'
 ا. أب ب. صديق ج. أخ د. صديقة هـ. عم
 e. 'uncle' d. 'friend' (F) c. 'brother' b. 'friend' (M) a. 'father'

3. فريد وأصدقائه ... الظهر في المسجد جماعة
 'Farid and his friends ... dzuhur in the mosque together'
 ا. يصلي ب. تُصلي ج. يُصليان د. يُصَلون هـ. تُصَليان
 e. 'pray' (D.F) d. 'pray' (P.M) c. 'pray' (D.M) b. 'prays' (S.F) a. 'prays' (S.M)

4. ... سلّم سليمان الرسائل إلى أصدقائه
 'Solomon ...the letters to his friends'
 ا. درّس ب. كتب ج. ذهب د. رسم هـ. قرأ
 e. 'read' d. 'drew' c. 'went' b. 'wrote' a. 'studied'

5. سافر أبي ... مكة المكرمة لإداء الحج
 'My father traveled ...Mecca to perform the Hajj'
 ا. من ب. في ج. على د. عن هـ. إلى
 e. 'to' d. 'about' c. 'on' b. 'in' a. 'from'

6. رتب هذه الكلمات لتكون جملة اسمية!
 'Arrange these words as a nominal sentences!'
 اللّغة - يدرّس - العربيّة - الطالب
 'language - studying - Arabic - a student'

7. رتب هذه الكلمات لتكون جملة فعلية!
 'Arrange these words as a verbal sentences!'
 المسلمات - القرآن - المسجد - تقرأ - في
 'muslim women - the Koran - the mosque - read - in'

***Notes:**
 S = Singular M = Masculine
 D = Dual F = Feminine
 P = Plural

Figure 3. Written Test Questions for Arabic Syntax Materials

Table 5. Final Test Results of Students' Arabic Syntax Understanding

Students' Arabic Syntax Understanding	Incorrect Answers		Correct Answers	
	Total	%	Total	%
Choosing a masculine noun that suits the context of the sentence	5	7.94	58	92.06
Choosing a feminine noun that suits the context of the sentence	4	6.35	59	93.65
Choosing an imperfective verb that suits the context of the sentence	25	39.68	38	60.32
Choosing a perfective verb that suits the context of the sentence	4	6.35	59	93.65
Choosing a particle that suits the context of the sentence	9	14.29	54	85.71
Arranging sentences into nominal sentences	3	4.76	60	95.24
Arranging sentences into verbal sentences	3	4.76	60	95.24

Based on Table 5, it can be identified that the majority of students (n = 58, 92.06%) were able to use masculine nouns in a sentence. The majority of students (n = 59, 93.65%) were able to use feminine nouns in a sentence. Table 5 also illustrates that the majority of students (n = 38, 60.32%) were able to use imperfective verbs in a sentence. The majority of students (n = 59, 93.65%) were able to use perfective verbs in a sentence. From Table 5 it can also be seen that the majority of students (n = 54, 85.71%) were able to use particles in a sentence. The majority of students (n = 60, 95.24%) were able to arrange nominal sentences and verbal sentences.

4. Discussions

This section elaborates the results of the post-action analysis. The results of the Arabic syntax material tests from the pre-action and post-action were compared. The results show that students' understanding of Arabic Syntax concepts have improved. In the pre-action test, the students did not know about the division of nouns by type, nor the division of verbs based on the time of occurrence. They could not define the meaning of a particle, nominal sentences, and verbal sentences. Furthermore, from the oral it was obtained that problems had lessened in most of the participants. Evidently, only nine (14.29%) students were unable to distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns, only five (7.94%) students were unable to mention particle examples, only seven (11.11%) students were unable distinguish between nominal sentences and verbal sentences, and 11 (20.63%) students were still unable to explain how to use perfective and imperfective verbs.

The comparison of the results of the pre-test and post-test was carried out through the Compare Two Related Samples (Sign Test) test after it was known that the data were not normally distributed and heterogeneous. The test results, as shown in Table 6, showed that the Z value is -7.811 and the 2-tailed p-value (z) is 0.000 which means it is smaller than α (0.05). Thus, H0 is rejected and as an alternative, H1 is accepted. This means that the mean on the pre-test is significantly different from the mean on the post-test.

Table 6. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Results

Sign Test	
<i>N-Ties</i>	63
<i>N+</i>	0
<i>min [N-,N+]</i>	0
<i>Z</i>	-7,811
<i>p-value (Z) 2-tailed</i>	0,000

The graph of increasing students' Arabic syntax understanding as results of pre-test and post-test is displayed in Figure 4. From the Figure 4, it can be inferred that the post-action test also shows an increase in students' understanding of Arabic syntactic concepts. Evidently, out of 63 (100%) students, only five (7.94%) students gave incorrect answers in using masculine nouns that suited the context of the sentence, only four (6.35%) students were unable to use feminine nouns that suited the context of the sentence, only four (6.35%) students were unable to use perfective verbs that suited the context of the sentence, only nine (14.29%) students were unable to use particles that suit the context of the sentence, and only three (4.76%) students were unable to arrange nominal sentences and verbal sentences correctly. However, 25 (39.68%) students still incorrectly used imperfective verbs that suited the context of the sentence.

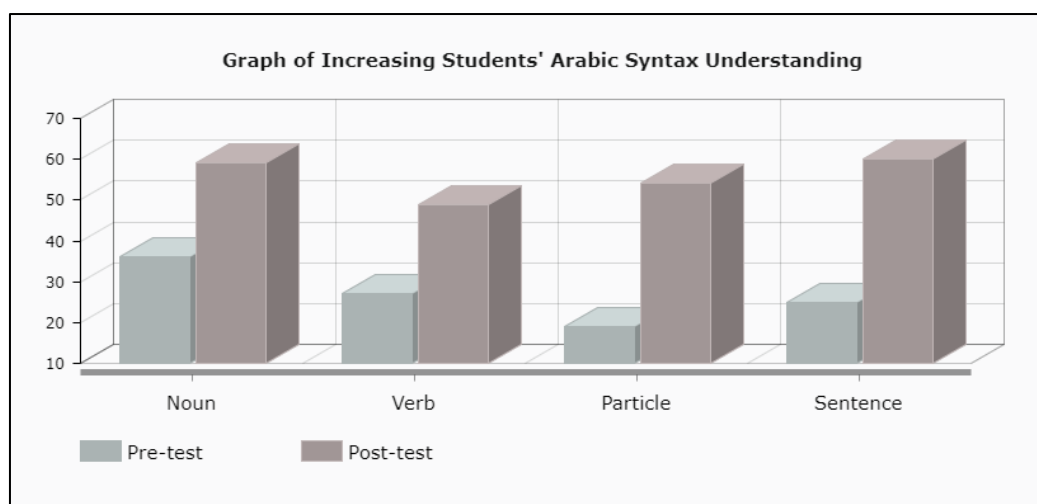


Figure 4. Graph of Increasing Students' Arabic Syntax Understanding

Figure 4 illustrates that the materials regarding nominal and verbal sentences had the highest percentage ($n = 60$, 95.24%) in the post-test, and this indicates that the majority of students had mastered the understanding of word constructs. Meanwhile, the lowest percentage ($n = 38$, 60.32%) was regarding imperfective verbs, and this indicates that there were still many students who had not mastered the use of imperfective verbs in a sentence. A following question arose, "Why are there still many students who do not understand the use of imperfective verbs, while most of them are already able to compose sentences with nominal and verbal sentences? Isn't the ability to formulate verbal sentences correctly preceded by understanding the use of verbs, whether they are perfective or imperfective?". After conducting an interview with one of the students who gave incorrect answers to questions about the use of imperfective verbs in a sentence, it was revealed that the error occurred because the student still did not understand the pattern of changing the form of the imperfective verb according to the number of subjects.

Further observations revealed that students had no difficulties in using imperfective verbs for single subject. However, they found it challenging to use imperfective verbs for plural subjects. Verbs in Arabic differ from those in Indonesian, in which the imperfective form is both prefixal and suffixal, hence the person feature realized as a prefix while the number feature is understood as a suffix, except in the first plural where it is realized as a prefix (Albirini, 2014; Benmamoun, 1999; Fahim, 2017; Khwaileh et al., 2020). This caused confusion among students.

The results of this action research provide an understanding that motivation in learning is essential for the students. Self-confidence is key in learning Arabic (Daud & Pisal, 2014). Building students' confidence to always think positively during learning makes them more prepared to learn new materials. Furthermore, the results of this action research also provide a new understanding that to make students understand the concept of Arabic syntax, it is necessary to provide more practical, effective and efficient materials. Learning materials must be designed simpler so that students can easily learn it. Giving a simple example of applying grammatical rules is preferred as it is perceived to be interesting (Hamidin et al., 2014). Teachers can choose familiar topics, for example, likes and dislikes, family, the environment, hobbies and interests, education, work, and travel. In addition to that, teachers should be selective in choosing words for students and considering the frequency of occurrences, and are easy to pronounce and a new word association with existing knowledge in order to optimize the learning process (Maskor et al., 2016). This is evident in students who have followed this learning process. By being taught material that is more practical, effective and efficient, students' understanding of syntactic concepts increases significantly. Arabic sentences have various patterns. Traditionally Modern Standard Arabic, as classical Arabic, is said to have two main sentences types: nominal (equational) sentence and verbal one (Homeidi, 2021). The lack of success of teachers in teaching

students to understand Arabic sentence patterns can also be caused by the lack of giving examples of Arabic sentence patterns with various forms and models and not training them with various development patterns. Then, in learning Arabic regarding its syntactic concepts, it is necessary to use technology as a learning resource and a means to communicate and consult related to learning between teachers and students. This is done to create a more pleasant learning atmosphere and as a solution to the limited hours of Arabic lessons at school. Mufidah et al. (2018) state that teachers should take selection of words into account, including the frequency of use, easy pronunciation, and close association to existing knowledge for optimal learning process. It is not impossible for teachers to use smartphones in learning Arabic in the classroom. This is in line with Zurqoni et al. (2020) who suggested that the use of smartphones in teaching Arabic in class is highly expected. Despite the significant improvement on the students' understanding of Arabic syntax, the results of their understanding of the verb concept remained unsatisfactory. Therefore, further research on the concept of Arabic syntax is important to conduct.

5. Conclusions

A series of action research processes that have been carried out have answered the research questions. Why do high school students not quite understand Arabic syntax? The results of the initial test showed that the majority of students did not know about the division of nouns by type, did not know the division of verbs based on the time of occurrence, could not define what a particle was, and had not been able to define nominal sentences and verbal sentences. This was because they did not have sufficient understanding of Arabic syntax in their previous school. Are high school students aware of the importance of understanding Arabic syntax? The survey results showed that they knew the importance of understanding Arabic syntax while also requiring proper learning steps. What critical-reflective steps can be taken in order to improve the understanding of Arabic syntax for high school students? The results of the study found that among the critical reflective steps that can be taken to improve understanding of Arabic syntax are fostering motivation, simplifying material, providing challenges, utilizing technology in learning, oral tests, and written tests. Can a series of critical-reflective steps improve the understanding of Arabic syntax for high school students? The results of this study revealed that students' Arabic syntactic understanding can be improved through a series of critical-reflective steps. On a frequent basis, students encounter problems in mastering Arabic syntax. Nonetheless, through this action research, it can be concluded that it is possible to make the students realize the urgency of learning Arabic syntactic concepts. Through a series of critical-reflective steps, students' understanding of Arabic syntactic concepts can be improved. In other words, the problem of poor understanding of Arabic syntax can be overcome by implementing critical-reflective action steps through collaborative work.

6. Recommendations

In learning Arabic syntax, students need to be trained to construct various sentence patterns so that they are not fixated on the examples given from the textbook. On that account, as a suggestion, Arabic teachers need to improve the quality of syntax learning by providing examples of Arabic sentence patterns in various forms and models for the students, as well as training them with various construction patterns intensively. In addition, further researches on students' understanding of Arabic syntactic concept are encouraged to provide further perspectives on alternative steps that can be taken to tackle the problems of learning Arabic that are still ongoing today.

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