

Analyzing the Grade VII Arabic Language Textbook through William F. Mackey's Theory: Linguistic and Pedagogical Aspects

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Abstract

This study analyzes the Grade VII Arabic textbook published by Erlangga using William F. Mackey's framework, with particular attention to its linguistic and pedagogical dimensions. The study responds to the continuing need for textbook evaluation in Arabic instruction at the Islamic junior secondary (madrasah tsanawiyah) level, where the textbook typically functions as the primary source of linguistic input, classroom practice, and skill sequencing. A qualitative content-analysis design was employed. The data consisted of thematic vocabulary, sentence patterns, dialogues, reading passages, grammar explanations, and exercises contained in the textbook, collected through documentation and analyzed according to the categories of selection, gradation, presentation, and repetition. The findings show that the textbook selects familiar themes such as self-introduction, family, school, and daily activities indicating alignment with learners' immediate context. Its gradation is generally progressive, moving from isolated vocabulary and simple dialogue toward short reading texts and basic grammatical explanation, although several passages remain relatively complex for beginners. In terms of presentation, the book combines dialogue (ḥiwār), reading (qirā'ah), visual illustration, and grammar explanation (qawā'id), although oral-communicative activities remain limited. Repetition is realized through completion, matching, sentence-ordering, and guided-conversation exercises, yet many drills remain mechanical. Overall, the textbook is pedagogically useful and linguistically appropriate for novice learners, but it requires stronger contextualization, more balanced skill integration, and richer communicative practice.

Keywords: Arabic textbook, linguistic aspect, Mackey's theory, Pedagogical aspect, textbook analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic language instruction at the madrasah tsanawiyah (Islamic junior secondary) level requires teaching materials that are not only linguistically accurate but also pedagogically effective. Textbooks remain the primary reference for introducing vocabulary, practicing grammatical structures, developing the four language skills, and sequencing the overall learning process (Brown, 2007; Tomlinson, 2011). Because of this central role, the quality of a textbook substantially shapes both the intensity of learners' exposure to the

target language and the quality of their overall learning experience. The present study analyzes the Grade VII Arabic textbook published by Erlangga, selected as a relevant object for examining how instructional content is selected, sequenced, presented, and reinforced in the context of early-stage Arabic learning.

Recent research suggests that evaluating an Arabic textbook can no longer stop at curriculum alignment alone; it must also assess level appropriateness, communicative orientation, visual quality, and exercise design. Khambali et al. (2023) found that Arabic textbooks used at the Islamic junior secondary (MTs) level generally correspond to the A1–A2 proficiency band but remain overly dominated by text comprehension, indicating a need for stronger contextualization and communicative orientation. Widyanti and Muta'ali (2022) similarly emphasized the importance of visual-textual congruence, since illustrations directly influence how easily learners grasp new material. Comparable concerns have been raised in studies of textbooks for other grade levels: Abd Latif (2022) evaluated a tenth-grade Arabic textbook against the 2013 Curriculum, Asbarin et al. (2022) examined Madrasah Aliyah textbooks against the principles of Rusydi Ahmad Thu'aimah, Nashrullah and Taufiq (2021) assessed the teacher's and student's handbooks for Grade XI, and Munasib (2023) analyzed how character-education values are embedded within Arabic textbooks under the 2013 Curriculum framework. Collectively, these studies indicate that textbook quality in Indonesian Islamic education continues to receive close scholarly attention across grade levels, yet coverage of early-secondary materials such as the Grade VII textbook remains comparatively limited.

A more specific body of research applies William F. Mackey's framework directly. Siregar et al. (2022) combined Mackey's theory with ACTFL standards to evaluate an eleventh-grade textbook developed under KMA 183, Farobi et al. (2022) analyzed a tenth-grade textbook issued by the Directorate of Curriculum, Facilities, and Student Affairs, Khaliza (2023) examined a Grade VII Madrasah Tsanawiyah textbook authored by Rachmad Faisal, and Sayyidaturrohimah and Niswah (2024) applied the same framework to the Malzamah Arabiyah teaching materials used at Markaz Arabiyyah Pare. Ritonga (2021) extended this line of inquiry to the Takallam bil 'Arabiyyah series, while Zaharo et al. (2024) applied Mackey's model to a sixth-grade elementary textbook developed under KMA 183. Taken together, this cluster of Mackey-based studies converges on a recurring finding: Arabic textbooks tend to show an imbalance between material selection, gradation, and the provision of genuinely communicative practice.

Within the study of language-teaching-material development, Mackey (1965) identifies selection, gradation, presentation, and repetition as the four principal criteria for textbook analysis. Selection concerns the appropriateness of the linguistic elements chosen for inclusion; gradation evaluates the sequencing of material from simple to complex; presentation examines how content is delivered to facilitate comprehension; and repetition assesses the quality of reinforcement through practice and drilling. This framework remains relevant because it brings linguistic and pedagogical dimensions together within a single, systematic analytical instrument.

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited number of investigations that specifically examine the Grade VII Arabic textbook published by Erlangga through Mackey's framework while foregrounding the integration of linguistic and pedagogical dimensions. As noted above, several prior studies instead focus on textbooks for the Madrasah Aliyah level, on materials developed under KMA 183, or on alternative frameworks such as ACTFL or CEFR (Nazilah et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2022). Evaluating early-level textbooks is nevertheless particularly important, since this is the stage at which learners' foundational vocabulary acquisition, sentence-pattern recognition, and language-learning habits begin to take shape.

The novelty of this study lies not in analyzing an under-examined textbook alone, but in the way it deliberately integrates linguistic and pedagogical evaluation within a single, unified reading of Mackey's four categories, rather than treating them as separate checklists. Within this journal itself, prior Mackey-informed textbook studies, such as Aziz and Primaningtyas's (2023) analysis of the *Al-'Arabiyah Baina Yadaik* series, have tended to emphasize the linguistic accuracy of content selection and gradation, while broader research on Arabic pedagogy published here, including Harimi and Ambarwati's (2021) study of Arabic instruction for learners with special needs and Fadhilla and Azhari's (2024) evaluation of digital instructional media, has approached pedagogical effectiveness largely apart from textbook-content analysis. The present study departs from this pattern by treating linguistic accuracy and pedagogical function as mutually constitutive rather than sequential concerns: a vocabulary item's selection is evaluated not only for its frequency and contextual fit but for whether its presentation genuinely enables productive classroom use, and the textbook's gradation is judged not only by structural progression but by whether that progression is pedagogically realized through communicative practice. Applying this integrated lens specifically to the Grade VII Erlangga textbook, a widely circulated resource at the point where learners' foundational habits of Arabic acquisition are formed, yet one that has received markedly less scholarly attention than *Madrasah Aliyah* or *KMA 183* materials, constitutes the study's principal contribution. This contribution is deliberately modest in scope: it does not claim to introduce a new theoretical model, but rather to demonstrate how Mackey's established framework can be applied more holistically to surface gaps that a purely linguistic or purely pedagogical analysis would, on its own, likely miss.

Building on this rationale, the present article aims to describe the quality of the Grade VII Arabic textbook published by Erlangga through Mackey's four categories and to interpret the findings from the perspective of language pedagogy. This study is expected to offer practical guidance for teachers in selecting and supplementing instructional materials, as well as academic input for Arabic textbook developers seeking to produce materials that are more communicative, better graded, and more responsive to learners' needs.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a content-analysis design. This approach was selected because the object of investigation the Grade VII Arabic textbook published by Erlangga constitutes a document that required in-depth analysis to identify patterns of content, presentation tendencies, and the character of the exercises it contains. The use of document analysis is consistent with the descriptive-qualitative approach commonly applied in textbook evaluation and text-based research, and follows established principles for systematic document analysis (Dalglish et al., 2020).

The primary data comprised all components of the textbook, particularly the instructional themes, vocabulary lists (*mufradāt*), dialogues, reading passages (*qirā'ah*), grammar explanations (*qawā'id*), illustrations, and exercises in each chapter. Secondary data were drawn from the literature on Arabic language teaching, textbook evaluation, and prior studies examining textbooks through the lenses of Mackey's theory, ACTFL, and CEFR. Data were collected through documentary study involving repeated reading, the recording of analytical units, and the classification of findings into four categories: selection, gradation, presentation, and repetition.

Data analysis proceeded through reduction, classification, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The researchers first identified sections of the textbook containing linguistic and pedagogical elements. These sections were then classified according to Mackey's categories, followed by a stage of critical interpretation to assess the extent to

which the textbook supports early-level Arabic instruction. The trustworthiness of the findings was maintained through sustained observation, cross-chapter comparison, and conceptual dialogue with the literature on language-material evaluation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the textbook possesses a relatively systematic structure and successfully combines linguistic content with learning activities. However, the quality of each component varies: several sections align strongly with Mackey's principles, while others require strengthening particularly with respect to the contextual use of vocabulary, the consistency of difficulty levels, and the proportion of communicative activities.

With respect to selection, the textbook tends to choose themes close to learners' everyday experience, such as self-introduction, family, school, and daily activities. This thematic choice is significant because it provides a natural entry point for beginning learners. Vocabulary items such as *ṭālib*, *mudarris*, *madrasah*, *kitāb*, and *qalam* represent a familiar learning environment. From a linguistic standpoint, this selection is appropriate, as it grounds the choice of material in frequency of use and contextual relevance. However, the findings also show that several vocabulary items are presented only as decontextualized lists and have not been consistently embedded in varied sentence contexts a condition that risks leaving learners able to recognize a word's meaning without adequately understanding its distributional use.

Table 1. Summary of Findings Based on Mackey's Four Aspects

Aspect	Main Indicator	Findings	Interpretation
Selection	Theme, vocabulary, basic structure	Themes close to learners' lives; basic vocabulary dominant	Suitable for beginners, but context of use is uneven
Gradation	Sequencing from simple to complex	Begins with simple <i>mufradāt</i> and dialogue, moving to reading and <i>qawā'id</i>	Reasonably progressive, though some readings are too dense for the beginner level
Presentation	Dialogue, reading, illustration, grammar explanation	Material is presented through <i>ḥiwār</i> , <i>qirā'ah</i> , illustration, and <i>qawā'id</i>	Supports comprehension, but oral activity is not yet dominant
Repetition	Reinforcement and recurrence exercises	Completion, matching, sentence-construction, and guided-conversation exercises are present	Strengthens retention, but remains largely mechanical

In terms of gradation, the textbook generally displays a sound sequence: learners are first introduced to vocabulary lists, then guided into short dialogues, brief reading passages, and finally grammar explanations and exercises. This pattern is consistent with the principle of graded instruction. Nevertheless, several reading passages exhibit structures that are relatively more complex than what beginning learners are typically prepared for. This inconsistency in difficulty level has also been documented in other studies of Arabic textbooks, suggesting that gradation remains one of the persistent challenges in Arabic-material development.

With respect to presentation, the textbook draws on a combination of *ḥiwār*, *qirā'ah*, illustration, and *qawā'id* explanation. This combination constitutes a strength of the textbook, as it offers learners more than one pathway to comprehension: dialogue demonstrates language use in context, reading passages extend meaning, and illustrations help learners connect words with concrete objects. Within a pedagogical framework, this combination reflects a positive multimodal orientation. However, the dominance of written exercises means that opportunities for oral practice and peer interaction remain underdeveloped. This concern echoes Widyanti and Muta'ali's (2022) finding that visual elements in Arabic textbooks are not always optimally aligned with their accompanying text, underscoring the broader point that recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes the expansion of communicative activity rather than text comprehension and form mastery alone.

In terms of repetition, reinforcement is realized through sentence-completion exercises, vocabulary-matching tasks, sentence-construction activities, and guided conversation. The presence of this variety is important, since language acquisition depends on repeated practice. Vocabulary introduced early in a chapter is frequently revisited in subsequent dialogues and exercises. However, the quality of repetition in this textbook remains stronger at the level of recall and controlled practice than at the level of creative use. In other words, learners are largely directed toward recognizing and rearranging existing language forms, but are seldom challenged to produce new utterances more freely.

Table 2. Pedagogical Implications of the Research Findings

Key Finding	Impact on Learning	Direction for Improvement
Relevant thematic vocabulary	Facilitates activation of learners' prior experience	Add examples of usage across varied situations
Generally progressive gradation	Supports transition from simple forms to connected text	Simplify readings that are too dense for beginners
Multimodal presentation	Improves comprehension access through dialogue and illustration	Increase paired oral tasks and group work
Predominantly mechanical exercises	Reinforces retention of language form	Add open-ended tasks, language games, and independent sentence production

When the four aspects are read in an integrated manner, it is evident that the textbook fulfils its basic function as an introductory Arabic-language resource. Linguistically, it is reasonably accurate in introducing thematic vocabulary, simple sentence patterns, and elementary grammatical rules. Pedagogically, it presents a learning sequence that both teachers and students can follow with relative ease. This pattern echoes Khaliza's (2023) analysis of a comparable Grade VII Madrasah Tsanawiyah textbook, which likewise found generally sound selection and gradation but limited communicative depth, as well as Zaharo et al.'s (2024) finding that even elementary-level KMA 183 materials tend to privilege recall-based repetition over productive language use. Nevertheless, to better align with a communicative orientation to language learning the very principle Tomlinson (2011) identifies as central to sound materials development the textbook still requires refinement in three respects: deeper contextualization of vocabulary use, more consistent gradation across chapters, and the addition of meaningful activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A comparable recommendation was made by Ritonga (2021) with

respect to the Takallam bil 'Arabiyyah series, underscoring that the tension between mechanical repetition and communicative production is not unique to this textbook but a recurring challenge across Mackey-based evaluations of Arabic teaching materials.

These findings also affirm that evaluating a textbook cannot rest solely on whether particular material is present or absent; it must also consider how that material is translated into a genuine learning experience. Accordingly, the contribution of this article extends beyond an assessment of a single textbook: it offers a basis for reflection for teachers and material developers regarding what should be retained and what should be improved when designing beginner-level Arabic instructional materials.

From the researchers' perspective, these findings carry distinct implications for each stakeholder group involved in Grade VII Arabic instruction. For teachers, the textbook's uneven contextualization of vocabulary means classroom practice cannot rely on the book alone to build usage competence; teachers need to actively supplement decontextualized word lists with situational drills, since the textbook's structure implicitly assumes a level of contextual scaffolding that its content does not fully supply. For textbook developers, the persistence of mechanical, recall-oriented repetition, despite the presence of varied exercise types, suggests that exercise variety alone is an insufficient proxy for communicative quality; developers should instead audit exercises by the cognitive demand they place on learners, distinguishing genuinely productive tasks from superficially varied but functionally repetitive ones. For beginner learners, the textbook's strength in thematic familiarity is pedagogically double-edged: it lowers the affective barrier to entry, but if not extended through communicative practice, familiarity with a theme can be mistaken for functional command of it, leaving gaps that surface only once learners are expected to use Arabic spontaneously. For the broader field of Arabic language pedagogy, this case illustrates that Mackey's four-part framework retains diagnostic value precisely because gradation and presentation can appear structurally sound while repetition remains pedagogically shallow, a dissociation that a less integrated analysis might overlook. In this sense, the textbook is not simply good but incomplete; its incompleteness is patterned in a way that points to where future revision effort would yield the greatest pedagogical return.

A limitation of this study is that it focuses solely on the analysis of a single textbook and does not examine its use directly in the classroom. Future research could therefore combine content analysis with classroom observation, teacher interviews, or comparative studies across textbooks, in order to develop a fuller understanding of the relationship between textbook design and learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This article shows that, when read through Mackey's theory, the Grade VII Arabic textbook published by Erlangga generally fulfils its basic function as an introductory instructional resource. The selection of themes and vocabulary is reasonably relevant to learners' experience, the gradation of material is generally progressive, the presentation integrates dialogue, reading, illustration, and grammar explanation, and repetition is realized through a range of reinforcement exercises. Nevertheless, the textbook's pedagogical quality is not yet fully optimal: the contextual use of vocabulary is not always deepened, the difficulty level across texts is not always consistent, and the exercises remain predominantly mechanical rather than communicative. The textbook's principal contribution therefore lies in providing a systematic linguistic foundation, while subsequent development should focus on expanding meaningful activities that integrate the four language skills and promote more active use of Arabic.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

(MA) conceived the study, designed the research methodology, supervised the research process, conducted the formal analysis, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript. (NS) contributed to the validation, formal analysis, and critical review of the manuscript. (DM) conducted the investigation, managed and curated the research data, organized the references, performed language editing, prepared the visualizations, and contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript. (IWS) contributed to the investigation. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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