



Overcoming the Anxiety Crisis in Learning Arabic Through Micro-Gamification: Transformation of the Nahwu-Sharf Teaching Method in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract: This study examines micro-gamification as a pedagogical strategy for addressing anxiety and affective barriers in Nahwu-Sharf learning at Al-Mashduqiah Modern Islamic Boarding School, Probolinggo. The study aims to analyze how micro-gamification creates a safer learning experience, enhances student participation, and strengthens students' confidence. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and verification. The findings reveal three main results. First, micro-gamification reduces affective barriers by providing simple challenges and opportunities to attempt tasks without excessive pressure. Second, its implementation increases student participation and confidence through short quizzes, group challenges, immediate feedback, and repeated opportunities to try. Third, micro-gamification can be integrated into Nahwu-Sharf learning in a brief, gradual, and contextual manner. The study concludes that micro-gamification represents a practical pedagogical strategy that integrates cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of Arabic language learning while creating a more active and psychologically supportive learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Learning Arabic in modern Islamic boarding schools is not only related to mastery of language structure, but also the psychological readiness of students to interact with complex material (Mukhasibi & Wahyudi, 2026). Learning anxiety is a crucial issue because emotional states can affect attention, courage to answer, engagement, and the sustainability of effective learning (Hilalludin, Sugari, Al-Nomani, & Muzanni, 2025). Anxiety as a specific construct related to the language acquisition process, while recent studies have shown that gamification has the potential to enhance engagement and the language learning experience (Amnouychokanant, 2025). Through a systematic review, found the benefits of various gamification tools in foreign language learning (Luo, 2023). Therefore, research on micro-gamification is important to provide safer, more engaging,

gradual, and adaptive Nahwu-Saraf learning for students. This approach can also strengthen an inclusive learning culture and reduce the stigma of mistakes.

In practice, Nahwu-Saraf learning in modern Islamic boarding schools still faces challenges in the form of perceptions that the material is difficult, abstract, full of rules, and demanding high precision (Islamiyah Nur Hidayati, Farida Inayati Tsania, & Purnomo, 2025). This situation can arise in the form of hesitation in answering, fear of making mistakes when reading or reciting, passivity during practice, and a tendency to memorize without understanding the use of rules. Baharun (2025) study shows that difficulties in learning Nahwu are related to cognitive load, first language interference, psychological barriers, and low motivation. In a different context, research on language anxiety also shows that academic pressure and low self-confidence can exacerbate learning anxiety (Hajiyeva, 2024). This phenomenon indicates that the problem of Nahwu-Saraf is not solely a cognitive methodology problem, but also an affective problem that requires simple and consistent pedagogical intervention. This approach must maintain the target of mastering rules in a measurable manner in learning.

Previous research has provided a strong foundation for the development of gamification in language learning. Carr (2024) introduced gamification as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. Zhang & Hasim (2023) found that gamification is worthy of study as a strategy to influence foreign language anxiety, although their research is still exploratory. Li, Luo, Bahari, Yang, & Chan (2025) Demonstrated through a systematic review that gamification can support engagement and foreign language learning outcomes, but its effectiveness depends on design and context. Meanwhile, Alkan (2026) Reported that gamified instruction in Nahwu-Saraf can increase student motivation. However, this study's weakness is that it emphasized motivation over anxiety and did not specifically examine micro-gamification as a small, gradual, and contextual intervention. This gap is crucial to examine in the modern Indonesian Islamic boarding school ecosystem.

This research focuses on shifting the orientation of gamification from simply increasing motivation to managing learning anxiety through micro-gamification. The concept of micro-gamification places game elements in short, integrated activities, such as points, incremental challenges, immediate feedback, badges, quick quizzes, group missions, and progress awards, without changing the overall learning process. This approach is relevant for modern Islamic boarding schools because it can be integrated into existing Nahwu-Saraf learning, including classical activities. Its novelty lies in the integration of only three dimensions: Arabic morphosyntactic material, psychological needs, and micro-design. Thus, this research is important in generating evidence on how mild pedagogical interventions reduce anxiety without reducing the depth of rule learning. This perspective offers a middle ground between conventional learning and low-cost digital innovation.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to answer several key questions: What are the forms and characteristics of students' anxiety in learning Nahwu-Saraf in modern Islamic boarding schools? How can micro-gamification be designed and implemented in Nahwu-Saraf learning activities? How do students respond to the use of short, gradual, and contextual game elements? To what extent does the application of micro-gamification contribute to reducing learning anxiety? What micro-gamification elements are most relevant for creating a safe, participatory, and challenging learning environment? These questions are important because previous research tends to focus on academic achievement, motivation, or engagement, while

the dimension of anxiety in learning Arabic grammar in Islamic boarding schools has not received adequate and proportional empirical attention in Arabic language education studies. The cultural context of Islamic boarding schools also needs to be taken into account so that realistic pedagogical interventions can be implemented.

This study argues that anxiety in learning Nahwu-Saraf can be reduced if the learning experience is designed with small, measurable challenges, immediate feedback, opportunities for repeated attempts, and rewards for progress, not solely for correct answers. Micro-gamification is seen as a pedagogical strategy that can transform the learning experience from a stressful, evaluative situation into a series of short activities that provide a sense of security, control, and progressive success. The originality of this study lies in the development of a micro-gamification approach specifically aimed at addressing anxiety in learning Nahwu-Saraf in modern Islamic boarding schools. Its contribution is theoretical by expanding the study of language gamification into the affective and contextual domains, and practical by offering a simple, flexible, and easily replicable activity model for teachers. This study also explains the pedagogical mechanisms that support changes in the students' learning experience.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at the Al-Mashduqiah Modern Islamic Boarding School, Probolinggo, as the primary context for the application of micro-gamification in Nahwu-Sarf learning. The unit of analysis is the learning process involving interactions between teachers, students, materials, strategies, and the Islamic boarding school environment. The research used a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the students' experiences and pedagogical practices in depth in a natural context. The selection of the case study was based on the characteristics of Al-Mashduqiah as a modern Islamic boarding school that pays attention to the development of Arabic language skills in academic and daily life. The research explored learning anxiety, students' responses, teachers' strategies for integrating game elements, and changes in the learning atmosphere based on social, pedagogical, and psychological contexts.

Information sources were selected purposively based on the informants' involvement and knowledge of Nahwu-Sarf learning and the application of micro-gamification. The number of informants was adjusted to ensure sufficient information and data saturation, while considering variations in abilities and learning experiences (Bouncken, Czakon, & Schmitt, 2026). Informants' identities were disguised to maintain confidentiality and research ethics. Primary informants consisted of Arabic teachers or Nahwu-Sarf instructors and students who participated in the learning directly. Teachers were selected based on their experience designing, implementing, and evaluating learning, while students were selected based on their experiences with learning conditions, including anxiety, self-confidence, engagement, and response to micro-gamification. Supporting informants could include language coordinators, educational administrators, or mentors who understand the Islamic boarding school's Arabic language program.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during Nahwu-Sarf learning to identify anxiety, participation, courage to answer, interaction, response to errors, as well as the use of challenges, points, feedback, progress awards, and simple competitions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and

students to obtain experiences, perceptions, obstacles, and changes during the learning process. Documentation complemented the data in the form of learning tools, materials, evaluation notes, activity results, and evidence of implementation. Analysis was conducted interactively through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Monaro, Gullick, & West, 2022). Reduction was carried out through thematic coding, display through matrices or narratives, while verification was carried out by comparing between sources and between techniques to obtain credible data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Micro-Gamification Reduces Affective Barriers in Nahwu-Sharf Learning

In this study, affective barriers are operationally defined as the emotional state of students during Nahwu-Sharf learning, characterized by fear of making mistakes, hesitation in answering, embarrassment when corrected, tension when faced with teacher questions, and a tendency to avoid participation. Interviews revealed that these barriers were more often manifested through passivity and excessive caution rather than resistance to learning. The application of micro-gamification provides space to confront the material through short activities, simple challenges, and opportunities for repeated attempts. Thus, micro-gamification is not simply the use of games, but a learning strategy that transforms the Nahwu-Sharf learning experience into a lighter, more gradual, and less emotionally stressful activity for students.

Interviews with teacher Nahwu-Sharf revealed a significant change in students' willingness to face mistakes. Nahwu explained, "Before using small games like quizzes or group challenges, some students seemed very cautious when I asked them to answer. They were afraid of getting the answer wrong. After the activity was made into a short challenge, they were more willing to try because they felt like they weren't being tested." Sharf added, "If the lesson went straight to the rules and I pointed to each student one by one, some students would immediately look down or avoid eye contact. But when I started with a simple game, they relaxed and started to answer." This statement indicates that micro-gamification reduces evaluative pressure.

The students' perspectives reinforce these findings. One student revealed, "I used to be afraid to answer questions about Nahwu because if I got it wrong, I'd feel embarrassed. After the quizzes and group games, I'm more confident answering because if I get it wrong, I can always try again." Another student stated, "If I'm just explaining the rules and then being asked to answer, I'm usually nervous because I'm afraid of making a mistake. But if it's made like a challenge, I feel more relaxed and want to try even though I'm not sure." These statements indicate that micro-gamification provides a gradual experience of success, thus reducing the fear of making mistakes. The researchers interpreted this change as the psychological space created to try, accept correction, and repeat answers without feeling like failure is a self-assessment of one's abilities.

Observations revealed a pattern consistent with the informant's description. When the lesson used rule explanations and direct questions, some students appeared passive, waiting for their peers to answer, and hesitant to respond to the teacher. When the activity was changed to a short challenge, a group quiz, or a rule identification game, the classroom atmosphere became more active and responses

increased. Students who had previously not responded immediately began raising their hands, discussing, and attempting to answer. Mistakes did not always prevent participation because students remained willing to try after receiving feedback. The researchers interpreted these changes as a shift from a stressful learning situation to a space for experimentation and correction.

Table 1 : The Effect of Micro-Gamification on Students' Affective Barriers

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Nahwu Teacher	"Before using small games like quizzes or group challenges, some students seemed very cautious when I asked them to answer. After the activities were structured as short challenges, they were more willing to try."	The courage to try increases
Guru Sharf	"When I started with simple games, they relaxed more and started to join in."	Learning stress is reduced
Students	"After there were quizzes and group games, I was more confident in answering because if I was wrong, I could still try again."	Fear of mistakes is reduced
Students	"If I make it like a challenge, I feel more relaxed and want to try even if I'm not sure."	Feelings of comfort and willingness to try increase

Based on the table, there is a consistent pattern between the experiences of teachers and students. Teachers observe changes through external behaviors, such as courage to answer questions, involvement in activities, and reduced avoidance when asked questions. Students describe these changes through internal experiences, such as reduced fear, tension, and shame when making mistakes. The data shows that micro-gamification works through two interconnected layers of change. The first layer is psychological change, namely increased feelings of safety and reduced anxiety about making mistakes. The second layer is manifested in learning behaviors, such as courage to try and maintain participation. This pattern suggests that affective barriers can change when activities provide opportunities for gradual success.

Another pattern suggests that micro-gamification does not eliminate the academic demands of Nahwu-Sharf, but rather changes how students approach them. The material still requires understanding rules, accurate identification, and the ability to apply language rules, but the process of mastery is fostered through small, measured activities. When challenges are presented simply, students are more willing to take risks, even when unsure. This suggests that the reduction in affective inhibition stems not only from the enjoyment of play, but also from the opportunity to try without severe social consequences. Thus, the data pattern demonstrates a relationship between micro-challenges, opportunities to try, feedback, and a sense of safety as mechanisms that enable students to approach the material with less emotional stress.

Micro-Gamification Increases Student Participation and Confidence

In this study, student participation and self-confidence were operationally defined as active involvement in Nahwu-Sharf learning, demonstrated through their courage to answer and ask questions, complete challenges, collaborate, come to the front of the class, and try again after making mistakes. Self-confidence was not measured through verbal statements, but based on behaviors observed during learning. Observations showed that micro-gamification increased the intensity of student engagement through short challenges, quizzes, rule identification games,

sentence construction, and group activities. These activities expanded students' opportunities to take roles, respond to questions, discuss, act, and receive direct feedback, so that learning was not solely centered on teacher explanations.

Table 2 : Results of Observation of Student Participation and Self-Confidence

learning activities	Observed behavior	Participation indicators	Self-confidence indicators	Initial interpretation
Explanation of the rules	Students listen more and take notes	Involvement is still limited	Some students hesitate to respond	Activities are still teacher-centered
Direct questions	Some students are waiting for their friends to answer	The response is not even	There is doubt about answering	Evaluative situations limit courage
Short quiz	Students begin to respond to questions spontaneously	Response frequency increases	Be braver to try the answer	Short challenges encourage engagement
Group challenge	Students discuss and divide tasks	Collaboration increases	Students are more courageous in expressing their opinions	Group support strengthens courage
Rule identification game	Students actively seek and determine answers	Individual and group activities increase	Students are willing to take the risk of answering	Game activities expand the opportunity to try
Corrections and feedback	Students correct their answers and try again.	Participation continues after correction	Mistakes don't stop engagement	Feedback is part of the learning process

Observational data shows that changes in participation developed following changes in learning activities, rather than occurring suddenly. During the rule explanation and direct questioning stages, engagement was limited and dominated by certain students. As learning shifted to short quizzes and group challenges, responses became more evenly distributed as students received specific tasks. Researchers interpreted micro-gamification as expanding participation through simple, immediate actions. Self-confidence was evident in the willingness to answer questions, express opinions, and try again after corrections. Thus, increased participation went hand in hand with the courage to take academic risks, especially when mistakes did not immediately stop students from engaging in the learning process.

The data pattern shows the development of participation from passive to active involvement. At the beginning of the lesson, students mostly received explanations, took notes, and waited for teacher direction. After micro-gamification was implemented, activities became interactive through quizzes, challenges, rule identification games, and group work. The most visible change was the courage to respond without waiting for a peer. Students who made mistakes also tended to correct their answers and participate in the next activity. This pattern suggests that self-confidence develops through repeated attempts. Micro-gamification creates a cycle of challenge, response, feedback, improvement, and retry, so that participation develops into sustained engagement in Nahwu-Sharf learning.

Micro-Gamification Implemented through Short, Gradual, and Contextual Nahwu-Sharf Learning Activities

Micro-gamification in this study is operationally defined as the use of short-

term game elements integrated into Nahwu-Sharf learning without altering the primary learning structure. This implementation is realized through simple activities such as quick quizzes, challenge cards, rule identification games, group assignments, point systems, and direct feedback. Documentation data shows that all these activities are implemented gradually and tailored to the learning material. Micro-gamification does not exist as a separate activity, but becomes part of the daily learning process. Based on the collected documentation, the implementation is carried out through iterative stages, starting from providing challenges, student involvement, feedback, progress awards, and re-experimentation in subsequent learning activities.

Research documentation shows that micro-gamification implementation occurs through simple, repetitive activities. Learning photos show the use of question cards, group quizzes, sentence structure identification games, point recording, and recognition of learning progress. Documentation also shows that these activities not only involve active students but also open up opportunities for participation to a wider range of students. Researchers interpret that the success of micro-gamification is not determined by the complexity of the game, but rather by the integration of the material, the form of challenges, and the teacher's response to learning outcomes. Short, gradual activities provide students with opportunities to engage without excessive pressure in active and directed Nahwu-Sharf learning.

The overall interpretation of the data indicates that micro-gamification forms a progressive learning cycle. Simple challenges encourage participation, participation generates experimental experience, that experience generates feedback, and the feedback encourages re-engagement in subsequent activities. This pattern suggests that changes in learning behavior do not occur instantly, but through consistent repetition of activities. The documentation also demonstrates a relationship between variations in learning activities and increased opportunities for student engagement. Thus, micro-gamification can be understood as a pedagogical mechanism that connects cognitive, affective, and social elements in Nahwu-Sharf learning through simple, easy-to-implement, gradual, and sustainable activities.



Figure 1 : Ideal Findings of Micro-Gamification

Interpretation of the image shows that micro-gamification works through a gradual process that connects learning materials with students' learning experiences. Short activities serve as a bridge between academic demands and

students' psychological readiness. Simple challenges facilitate student engagement, while feedback and rewards help maintain engagement. Thus, the effects of micro-gamification do not emerge immediately, but rather through a series of learning experiences that foster a sense of security, courage to try, and sustained engagement.

Another visible pattern is that all the components in the image are interconnected and inseparable. Good material without engaging challenges doesn't necessarily increase participation, while games without feedback don't always result in meaningful learning. Therefore, the effectiveness of micro-gamification lies in the relationship between challenge, participation, feedback, and the opportunity to try again. This pattern suggests that effective Nahwu-Sharf learning is determined not only by the content but also by the design of the learning experience that allows students to develop gradually and sustainably.

Discussion

Micro-Gamification Reduces Affective Barriers in Nahwu-Sharf Learning

The research findings indicate that micro-gamification plays a role as a pedagogical strategy to reduce affective barriers in Nahwu-Sharf learning. This finding aligns with Telhaj & Çaçi (2024) concept of foreign language anxiety, which states that language anxiety is related to perceptions of communication skills, evaluation, and errors. Field data shows that students tend to be tense when learning is perceived as a direct evaluation, while micro-challenges provide a safer space for experimentation. These results also support Zhang & Hasim (2023) research on the potential of gamification in reducing language anxiety. The difference is that this study places Nahwu-Sharf in the context of a modern Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) with small, gradual interventions integrated with routine learning activities.

Theoretically, these findings broaden the understanding of gamification from a motivation-enhancing mechanism to a strategy for managing affective experiences in Arabic language learning. Micro-gamification demonstrates that game elements can regulate the intensity of learning pressure through small challenges, repeated attempts, and immediate feedback (Early, 2023; Hudhel & Ferdiansyah, 2025). Practically, these findings demonstrate that anxiety reduction does not always require major curriculum changes. Teachers can modify activities into short quizzes, group challenges, rule-identification games, or short learning missions (Israelashvili & Freedman-Goldberg, 2023). Its primary contribution is offering a simple, flexible approach that aligns with the characteristics of Islamic boarding school learning without diminishing the essence of mastering Nahwu-Sharf (Muttaqin, Akbar, Fitri, & ..., 2026). Thus, micro-gamification is a pedagogical alternative that is easy for teachers to implement.

Research findings indicate that the success of micro-gamification depends on how teachers manage mistakes and competition. Games that embarrass students, overemphasize rankings, or impose excessive time pressure have the potential to create new stressors (Ghattas & El-Ashry, 2024). Therefore, micro-gamification needs to be directed at the courage to try and individual development, not solely at winning. These findings add to the gamification literature, explaining that positive impacts do not automatically emerge simply by adding game elements. In modern Islamic boarding schools, micro-gamification design needs to consider the learning culture, student abilities, the nature of Nahwu-Sharf material, and teacher-student relationships. Its contribution lies in affirming that pedagogical transformation can

begin with small changes that create a safer, more participatory learning space and make mistakes part of the learning process.

Micro-Gamification Increases Student Participation and Confidence

The research findings indicate that micro-gamification encourages increased participation and self-confidence in students' Nahwu-Sharf learning. This finding aligns with Li et al. (2025) findings, which demonstrate the positive impact of gamification on foreign language learning engagement, although its effectiveness varies by context. These findings also align with Zhang & Hasim, (2023) studies of the relationship between gamification and foreign language anxiety and the importance of alternative learning experiences to conventional language learning. The difference is that this study positions participation and self-confidence as directly observed behavioral changes in Nahwu-Sharf learning in modern Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, the research findings are not solely based on perceptions or quantitative measurements.

Theoretically, these findings suggest that participation and confidence in Nahwu-Sharf learning develop through a cycle of challenge, response, feedback, and retry (Yunaldi & Sihotang, 2023). This broadens the meaning of gamification from the use of points or rewards to a structured learning experience that allows students to take gradual academic risks. Practically, teachers can implement micro-gamification without completely replacing the learning method. Short quizzes, group challenges, rule-identification games, and correction activities can be inserted into regular lessons (Torrado Cespón & Díaz Lage, 2022). An important contribution of this research is that it demonstrates that micro-activities can be a pedagogical tool to expand participation opportunities, especially for students who previously tended to be passive in Nahwu-Sharf learning.

Research findings need to be critically interpreted because gamification does not always produce positive impacts. Luo points out that the effectiveness of foreign language gamification is influenced by element selection, learner characteristics, activity design, and how effectiveness is measured (Luo, 2022). Systematic reviews also show that competitions, points, badges, and leaderboards can have unintended effects if used inappropriately (Nyholm, 2024). Therefore, micro-gamification needs to be designed with proportional challenges and a progression orientation. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the success of a strategy is not determined by the competitiveness of the game, but by its ability to create equitable participation and encourage students to try, correct mistakes, and continue their involvement in Nahwu-Sharf learning.

Micro-Gamification Implemented through Short, Gradual, and Contextual Nahwu-Sharf Learning Activities

The research findings indicate that micro-gamification is not simply the addition of game elements to learning, but rather a strategy for organizing the learning experience in stages. These results align with Carr (2024) view that gamification relates to the use of game elements in non-game contexts to increase engagement. These findings also support research on language gamification, which shows that short activities and feedback can enhance the learning experience (Liu, Fathi, & Rahimi, 2024). The difference is that this study places micro-gamification in Nahwu-Sharf learning in a modern Islamic boarding school and emphasizes the relationship between simple challenges, participation, and a sense of security in learning.

Theoretically, this study extends the study of gamification by demonstrating

that the size and intensity of game activities influence the learning experience. Micro-gamification works not through intense competition, but through small challenges that allow students to gradually achieve success (KUMAR & KRISHNA, 2026). Practically, teachers can implement this strategy without having to change the curriculum or use complex technology (Abedi, 2024). The contribution of this research is to offer a learning model that is easy to implement, appropriate to Islamic boarding school culture, and able to integrate cognitive, affective, and social aspects in Nahwu-Sharf learning.

These findings also imply that learning innovation doesn't always have to involve major changes, but can start with simple, repetitive activity modifications. Micro-gamification demonstrates that short challenges, immediate feedback, and progress recognition can build more sustained engagement. In the context of Arabic language education, this model can be an alternative to addressing overly teacher-centered learning (Zakari & Jamil, 2025). An important contribution of this research is providing a conceptual framework for the relationship between activity design, learning experiences, and student behavior change in Nahwu-Sharf learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that micro-gamification is a potential pedagogical approach to address affective barriers and enhance the Nahwu-Sharf learning experience at the Al-Mashduqiah Modern Islamic Boarding School in Probolinggo. Three key findings complement each other. First, micro-gamification reduces affective barriers through a safe, flexible learning environment that provides room for error without excessive pressure. Second, its implementation increases participation and confidence through short challenges, collaborative activities, opportunities for experimentation, and immediate feedback. Third, documentation shows that micro-gamification can be integrated simply, gradually, and contextually without changing the overall learning structure. Thus, micro-gamification is a small-scale pedagogical transformation strategy that connects the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of Arabic language learning.

Conceptually, this study confirms that anxiety reduction in Nahwu-Sharf learning can begin through redesigning the learning experience at the activity level. Simple, measurable challenges provide students with opportunities to try, receive feedback, correct mistakes, and re-engage, thus building a sense of gradual success, a sense of security, and a willingness to learn. Practically, micro-gamification offers Arabic language teachers a simple and flexible strategy that can be implemented without complex technology. However, this study was limited to a single Islamic boarding school context and used a qualitative approach, thus not measuring changes in anxiety quantitatively. Future research should test this model across various Islamic boarding schools, levels, and student characteristics through mixed methods or experimental designs.

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