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The Snowballing Method to Improve Arabic Reading Skills of Grade XI Students at MAS Darus Arifin

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Abstract: This study investigates the implementation of the Snowballing method in Arabic language learning among Grade XI students at MAS Darul Arifin. The study was motivated by the need to develop more interactive and collaborative learning practices that can enhance students' Arabic reading comprehension, participation, and confidence. This study aims to describe the implementation of the Snowballing method, identify students' responses and engagement, and analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its application. A qualitative research design with a case study approach was employed. Data sources included the Grade XI Arabic language teacher, selected students, and the Vice Principal for Curriculum. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and verification. The findings show that Snowballing was implemented progressively through individual reading, paired discussion, and larger-group discussion. The method encouraged active participation, interaction, motivation, and confidence. However, its implementation was constrained by differences in reading ability, limited learning time, student shyness, unequal participation, and teachers' limited mastery of facilitation techniques. The study concludes that Snowballing can support interactive Arabic learning when accompanied by effective teacher facilitation, differentiated support, balanced grouping, and appropriate time management.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the Arabic language has progressed rapidly in both formal and non-formal institutions; however, various obstacles remain in teaching it at school, for both teachers and students. Arabic language learning is generally easy to find in Islamic-based schools, whether through written instruction in grammatical rules or through direct oral ractice (Fawzani et al., 2024; Parida et al., 2026). Arabic is still regarded as intimidating by students because it is seen as more difficult to learn than other languages, mainly due to the large number of rules that must be mastered (Irfani & Shalahuddin, 2026). The teacher's role is therefore crucial in determining learning strategies suited to the objectives and conditions of the students in the classroom. Strategy is a critical element that a teacher must

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possess before teaching.

One of the obstacles in Arabic language learning is students' lack of reading skill. Reading ability is a fundamental skill that involves mastery of vocabulary and grammar, as well as an in-depth understanding of a text's content and contex (Fitrianto et al., 2023). Reading skill encompasses two main aspects: converting written symbols into sound, and uncovering the meaning behind those sound and written symbols. Reading may be done aloud (al-qirā'ah al-jahriyah) or silently (al-qirā'ah al-ṣāmitah); reading aloud involves not only pronouncing and understanding the text but also deeply internalizing its content (Hemade et al., 2026). In practice, students at the MA (Islamic senior secondary) level, including grade XI at MAS Darul Arifin, still experience difficulty reading Arabic texts. MAS Darul Arifin is a formal Islamic educational institution located on Jl. Besuki, Jatisari Village, Wringin District, Bondowoso Regency, East Java, with a curriculum that includes Arabic as a subject. In its learning process, reading skill (mahārat al-qirā'ah) is the main focus of study, and teachers use student worksheets (LKS) as guidelines so that learning is more directed, without neglecting other skills such as speaking (mahārat al-kalām), writing (mahārat al-kitābah), and listening (mahārat al-istimā').

Efforts to increase student engagement and learning outcomes in Arabic language learning can be pursued through innovations in student-centered learning methods, such as cooperative learning. The snowballing method is one effective cooperative approach because it actively engages students through tiered discussion, moving from individual tasks to pairs and then to larger groups. This method helps students grasp concepts and improve their Arabic reading skills collaboratively, while also building self-confidence and learning motivation. Etymologically, the Snowballing learning method comes from two words, “snow” and “ball.” It is named as such because in this learning process students first work individually, then in pairs, and these pairs subsequently merge into ever-larger groups, much like a snowball rolling and Growing (Asadi Et Al., 2024; Kerroum & Dendane, 2025). According To Yeo Et Al (2022), this strategy is used to arrive at answers through tiered discussion, moving from small groups to larger ones, thereby producing several jointly agreed-upon answers. The strategy is effective for material that demands deep thinking, analysis, and synthesis. Applying the snowballing method at MAS Darul Arifin provided an interactive, collaborative learning experience and helped students develop their literacy skills more effectively.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to investigate the implementation of the Snowballing method in Arabic language learning among Grade XI students at MAS Darul Arifin. The unit of analysis was the implementation of the Snowballing method as an instructional strategy, particularly its application in Arabic reading activities and collaborative classroom interaction. The research focused on the learning process, student participation, teacher facilitation, and factors influencing the implementation of the method. The case was examined within the natural classroom context to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the Snowballing method was implemented in actual learning situations. The qualitative case study approach was selected because it enabled the researcher to explore the phenomenon in depth through participants' experiences,

classroom interactions, and contextual conditions without manipulating the learning environment.

The sources of information consisted of individuals directly involved in the implementation of Arabic language learning through the Snowballing method at MAS Darul Arifin. The primary informant was the Grade XI Arabic language teacher, who provided information concerning the learning procedures, student responses, supporting factors, and obstacles encountered during implementation. Additional information was obtained from Grade XI students, including Bahrurozi, who described students' experiences, participation, confidence, group interaction, and difficulties during the learning process. The Vice Principal for Curriculum, was also involved as an informant to provide information regarding assessment practices and the broader implementation of learning activities. These informants were selected purposively because they possessed direct knowledge and experience relevant to the research focus.

Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Arabic language teacher, selected Grade XI students, and the Vice Principal for Curriculum to obtain detailed information regarding the implementation, responses, supporting factors, and inhibiting factors associated with the Snowballing method. Classroom observations were conducted to examine the actual learning process, student participation, group interaction, and teacher facilitation. Documentation was used to complement interview and observation data. The collected data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. During reduction, relevant information was selected and organized according to the research focus. Data were then displayed thematically to identify patterns and relationships (Aldawood et al., 2023). Finally, conclusions were verified by comparing information from interviews, observations, and documentation to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of the Snowballing Method in Arabic Language Learning

The findings indicate that the Snowballing method was implemented gradually and systematically in Arabic language learning among Grade XI students at MAS Darul Arifin. The implementation began with individual activities, continued through paired discussion, and developed into larger group discussions. At the initial stage, students were instructed to read and understand a text concerning Hajj and Umrah independently. This activity provided students with an opportunity to identify important information and develop their initial understanding before interacting with their classmates. After completing the individual task, students were paired to exchange information and discuss the content they had understood. The discussion included the pillars of Hajj, procedures for performing Hajj, and the meaning of Umrah. The findings show that this gradual structure allowed students to move from individual comprehension toward collaborative learning. Each stage was connected to the next, creating a learning process in which students were progressively encouraged to share information and participate in Arabic learning activities.

Following the individual reading activity, students entered the second stage

by working in pairs. In this stage, students exchanged information and compared their understanding of the reading material. The teacher encouraged students to explain information obtained from the text and respond to their partners' explanations. The topics discussed included the pillars of Hajj, procedures for performing Hajj, and the meaning of Umrah. After the paired discussion was completed, several pairs were combined into larger groups. The larger groups were expected to integrate the information obtained from previous discussions and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the material. Students discussed broader aspects of Hajj and Umrah, including the wisdom and values contained in the pilgrimage. Observation showed that the gradual expansion of discussion created opportunities for students to encounter different interpretations of the same material. Thus, the Snowballing process was characterized by progressive interaction, beginning with individual comprehension and expanding toward collaborative understanding through increasingly larger groups.

The third stage involved merging pairs into larger groups so that students could develop the results of their previous discussions. At this stage, students were required to communicate the information they had obtained, compare different answers, and formulate a broader understanding of the reading material. The discussion was not limited to factual information about Hajj and Umrah but also addressed the wisdom and values contained in the pilgrimage. Students therefore had opportunities to listen to different perspectives and negotiate their understanding with other group members. The teacher functioned primarily as a facilitator who monitored the discussion, provided clarification when necessary, and maintained the focus of the learning activity. The findings further show that the Snowballing method required students to be actively involved throughout the learning sequence rather than merely receiving explanations from the teacher. The transition from individual work to pair discussion and subsequently to larger groups demonstrated that the method was implemented through an organized sequence of increasingly complex social interactions during Arabic language learning.

The implementation of the Snowballing method was also accompanied by several classroom-management considerations. The teacher explained that students were encouraged to participate actively, express opinions, and ask questions related to the material. However, the teacher identified differences in students' reading abilities as one challenge that affected discussion. Mrs. Wardatul Jannah, the Grade XI Arabic teacher, stated, *"The main obstacle encountered is the fairly significant difference in reading-ability levels among students. Some students already read fluently, while others still have difficulty recognizing letters and tajwid. This condition makes group discussion less effective, because the more proficient students tend to dominate. In addition, the time needed to ensure that all students understand the material is longer than with conventional methods"*. This statement confirms that the implementation required careful teacher facilitation. Therefore, although the Snowballing procedure followed a systematic progression, its implementation was influenced by students' initial abilities and the amount of instructional time available.

Student Participation, Motivation, and Learning Engagement through the Snowballing Method

The second major finding concerns the changes in students' participation, motivation, and engagement during Arabic language learning. Observation and

interviews indicated that the Snowballing method created opportunities for students to participate actively in the learning process. Students were not only expected to read the material but also to communicate their understanding, exchange information, listen to their classmates, and contribute to group discussions. The gradual organization of activities provided students with several opportunities to become involved before participating in larger discussions. This condition was particularly important for students who were initially hesitant to speak in front of the entire class. Participation began in a relatively smaller setting and gradually expanded as students moved from individual work to pair and group activities. The findings indicate that students' involvement was therefore reflected not only in verbal participation but also in reading, exchanging information, listening, discussing, and responding to classmates. These activities created a more interactive learning process in which students had greater opportunities to engage directly with Arabic learning materials and their peers.

The classroom atmosphere was another supporting finding identified during implementation. Students generally responded positively to the Snowballing method because they could learn together, exchange information, and help one another. Mrs. Wardatul Jannah, the Grade XI Arabic teacher, explained, *"Students' response to the Snowballing method is generally positive. They feel more challenged and happier because they can learn together with friends and help one another. Compared to lecture-based or individual learning, this method is more interactive and keeps students from getting bored easily. That said, some students initially felt awkward or shy, but over time they grew accustomed to it and became more confident."* The interview demonstrates that students' responses developed during the learning process. Although some students initially experienced awkwardness and shyness, continued participation in group activities gradually made them more accustomed to the learning situation. The findings therefore show that the Snowballing method was associated with an increasingly interactive classroom atmosphere, characterized by peer assistance, collaborative participation, and greater student involvement throughout the learning activities.

The findings also show that the teacher's role was important in supporting students' participation and maintaining effective interaction during the Snowballing process. The teacher did not simply deliver Arabic learning material but facilitated the movement of students from one discussion stage to another. During group activities, the teacher monitored student participation, clarified information, encouraged less active students to contribute, and maintained the direction of discussion. The teacher's facilitation was particularly important because students demonstrated different levels of reading ability and confidence. In addition, the learning process was supported by varied forms of assessment. Mr. Ubaidir Rahman, S.Pd., Vice Principal for Curriculum, stated, "Assessment is carried out in various ways, such as reading-ability tests, direct observation during learning, discussion, and student reflection. It also takes into account the increase in students' confidence in reading Arabic." This finding indicates that assessment was not restricted to written or reading tests. Direct observation, discussion, and reflection were also used to identify students' development during the learning process. Student participation and confidence consequently became observable components of the learning outcomes.

The student interviews further revealed that participation and confidence were closely related to the organization of group learning. Bahrurozi, a Grade XI

student at MAS Darul Arifin, stated, *"Initially, I admit I felt shy and awkward, especially when having to speak in front of friends. I also found it difficult to participate actively in discussion because some friends were faster and more fluent readers, which lowered my confidence in voicing opinions. In addition, some group members were not very serious, so the discussion did not run smoothly. The available time felt insufficient because the discussion process proceeded gradually from individual to large-group level, making the learning process longer and the material sometimes not fully discussed"*. This statement shows that student engagement was not uniform at the beginning of implementation. Some students required time to develop confidence and adapt to collaborative discussion. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the Snowballing method provided repeated opportunities for interaction. Through these opportunities, students could gradually become more familiar with discussion activities and participate more actively in the Arabic language learning process.

Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Snowballing Method

The third major finding relates to the inhibiting factors encountered during the implementation of the Snowballing method. The most prominent obstacle was the difference in reading ability among students. Some students were able to read Arabic fluently, whereas others still experienced difficulty recognizing Arabic letters and applying tajwid. This difference affected the distribution of participation during group discussions. More proficient students tended to speak more frequently and dominate the discussion, while students with weaker reading abilities were less confident about expressing their understanding. Mrs. Wardatul Jannah stated, *"The main obstacle encountered is the fairly significant difference in reading-ability levels among students. Some students already read fluently, while others still have difficulty recognizing letters and tajwid. This condition makes group discussion less effective, because the more proficient students tend to dominate."* The finding demonstrates that heterogeneous student ability created a challenge in maintaining balanced participation. Students who had difficulty understanding the material independently also entered discussion with less preparation. Consequently, the teacher needed to provide additional guidance to ensure that differences in reading ability did not prevent students from participating in the learning activities.

Limited learning time constituted another important inhibiting factor. The Snowballing method requires several interconnected stages, beginning with individual reading, followed by pair discussion, and continuing with larger-group discussion. Each stage requires sufficient time for students to read, exchange information, clarify understanding, and communicate their ideas. Consequently, the total learning duration was longer than that required by conventional teacher-centered instruction. Mr. Ubaidir Rahman, Vice Principal for Curriculum, stated, *"In addition, the time needed for discussion is also longer than with conventional methods."* The students also expressed a similar concern. Bahrurozi stated that the available time felt insufficient because the discussion process proceeded gradually from individual to large-group level, making the learning process longer and causing some material not to be fully discussed. These findings show that time management was a significant issue in the implementation of the method. When discussion required more time than expected, some learning material could not be explored completely. The teacher therefore had to organize each stage carefully within the available instructional period.

Another inhibiting factor was students' initial feelings of awkwardness, shyness, and lack of confidence. Some students were reluctant to speak because they

were afraid of making mistakes or comparing themselves with classmates who were more fluent in reading Arabic. Bahrurozi explained, “Initially, I admit I felt shy and awkward, especially when having to speak in front of friends. I also found it difficult to participate actively in discussion because some friends were faster and more fluent readers, which lowered my confidence in voicing opinions.” This condition affected students' willingness to express opinions during group activities. In addition, unequal participation occurred when more dominant students controlled the conversation, leaving less proficient students with fewer opportunities to contribute. The findings also show that some group members were not sufficiently serious during discussions, which disrupted the smoothness of the learning process. Differences of opinion among students could further require teacher intervention to maintain focus and ensure that discussion remained productive. Thus, although group interaction was central to the method, the quality of participation depended on students' confidence, seriousness, and ability to communicate within the group.

The final inhibiting factor concerned teachers' mastery of the Snowballing method and their ability to facilitate group interaction. Not all teachers had fully mastered the techniques required to manage gradual group formation, distribute participation, direct discussion, and ensure that every student contributed. When facilitation was insufficient, dominant students could control the conversation, while less proficient students remained passive. Teacher intervention was also needed when students had different interpretations or opinions and when discussions moved away from the learning objectives. The findings indicate that effective implementation therefore depended not only on the Snowballing procedure itself but also on the teacher's ability to manage classroom dynamics. The identified inhibiting factors can consequently be summarized into several interconnected issues: differences in students' reading abilities, limited learning time, students' shyness and lack of confidence, unequal opportunities to participate, difficulties in independently understanding the material, differences of opinion requiring facilitation, and teachers' limited mastery of the method. These factors influenced the smoothness of implementation and needed to be addressed through appropriate classroom management and teacher preparation.

Discussion

Implementation of the Snowballing Method in Arabic Language Learning

The implementation of the Snowballing method demonstrates that gradual interaction can provide a structured pathway for students to construct understanding collaboratively (Muhimatul Alfiyah, 2024). The movement from individual reading to pair discussion and larger-group interaction reflects the principles of constructivist learning, in which knowledge is developed through active engagement and interaction rather than passive reception (Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2025). In Arabic language learning, this sequence is particularly relevant because students need opportunities to process linguistic input before communicating it with others. The finding supports the view that cooperative learning can facilitate interaction, peer assistance, and active participation. The gradual expansion of discussion also reduces the psychological pressure associated with immediately speaking before a large group (Alammar et al., 2022). Thus, the Snowballing method does not merely organize students into groups but creates a progressive learning environment in which individual comprehension becomes the foundation for collaborative meaning-making.

The finding further extends the application of cooperative learning principles to Arabic reading instruction by demonstrating the relationship between individual preparation and collective knowledge construction (Abourehab, 2025). The stages of Snowballing allow students to repeatedly reconstruct and communicate their understanding, while teachers facilitate rather than dominate the learning process (Alharbi & Shet, n.d.). This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing that student-centered and cooperative learning can increase interaction and engagement in language classrooms . However, the present finding also indicates that the effectiveness of gradual group formation depends on students' initial linguistic readiness and teacher facilitation. Therefore, Snowballing should not be understood as a mechanical grouping technique but as a structured pedagogical process requiring careful instructional design (Alharbi & Shet, n.d.; Bergman et al., 2021; Humaid Al-Shamsi et al., 2023). Its effectiveness emerges when individual comprehension, peer interaction, group negotiation, and teacher guidance are integrated into one coherent learning sequence.

This finding contributes to Arabic language education by demonstrating how the Snowballing method can operationalize constructivist and cooperative learning principles in Arabic reading instruction. Teachers should design learning stages progressively, provide clear reading tasks, establish discussion roles, and actively facilitate transitions between individual, paired, and larger-group activities. Future studies should investigate the effectiveness of different Snowballing group configurations and compare the method with other cooperative learning models using larger samples and mixed-method designs.

Student Participation, Motivation, and Learning Engagement

The increased participation and positive responses observed during Snowballing can be explained through the social and collaborative nature of the learning process (Albkowr & Haider, 2023). Students receive opportunities to communicate their understanding in smaller groups before presenting ideas in larger discussions. This gradual exposure can reduce anxiety and provide social support, particularly for students who initially lack confidence in speaking Arabic. The finding is consistent with cooperative learning perspectives, which emphasize positive interdependence, interaction, and individual participation (Ridha et al., 2025). The teacher's role as facilitator is also important because effective guidance can prevent dominant students from controlling discussions and encourage quieter students to participate. Moreover, the use of reading tests, observation, discussion, and reflection demonstrates that learning engagement can be assessed through both cognitive and affective dimensions (Düzgün & Kırkıç, 2023). Therefore, student participation in Snowballing represents not merely increased classroom activity but a broader process involving confidence, interaction, motivation, and responsibility.

The finding also suggests that students' positive responses developed progressively rather than appearing immediately. Initial shyness and hesitation indicate that collaborative learning does not automatically guarantee equal participation (Finell et al., 2021). Students need repeated opportunities to interact before they become comfortable expressing ideas. This finding complements previous research on student-centered language learning, which generally associates collaborative interaction with increased engagement and confidence. Nevertheless, the present study highlights an important condition: peer interaction can simultaneously support and constrain participation. Students with stronger Arabic reading abilities may become more dominant, whereas weaker students may

become passive (Alkhateeb & Bouherar, 2023). Thus, motivation and participation depend on how teachers organize group roles and monitor interaction. The Snowballing method can produce a supportive learning environment when collaboration is accompanied by equitable participation strategies, continuous teacher monitoring, and assessment that recognizes both linguistic development and students' growing confidence.

The study contributes by showing that Snowballing can support not only Arabic reading development but also students' motivation, confidence, interaction, and classroom engagement. Arabic teachers should establish equitable participation rules, assign discussion roles, encourage quieter students, and use formative assessment to monitor both linguistic and affective development. Future research should examine the relationship between Snowballing, students' motivation, self-confidence, speaking anxiety, and Arabic learning achievement through quantitative and longitudinal approaches.

Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Snowballing Method

The inhibiting factors demonstrate that the effectiveness of Snowballing is strongly influenced by classroom heterogeneity and instructional conditions. Differences in Arabic reading ability can create unequal participation because students with stronger linguistic competence are more capable of processing texts and expressing ideas. From a differentiated-learning perspective, students require different levels of scaffolding to participate meaningfully (Berglundh et al., 2025; Kharaba et al., 2022). The finding therefore indicates that cooperative learning does not automatically eliminate differences between learners. Instead, group interaction can sometimes make those differences more visible. Limited instructional time presents another challenge because the Snowballing sequence requires several stages of interaction (Alebri et al., 2026; Alhomoud et al., 2025). The finding is therefore understandable from the perspective of instructional efficiency: the greater the number of interaction stages, the greater the time required for students to process, discuss, and integrate information. Effective implementation consequently requires alignment between learning objectives, group size, task complexity, and available classroom time.

Students' shyness, unequal participation, disagreement, and teachers' limited mastery of the method further demonstrate that successful Snowballing depends on effective classroom facilitation (Safriyani et al., 2022). Collaborative learning requires teachers to manage interaction, provide scaffolding, resolve disagreement, and maintain students' focus on learning objectives. The present findings therefore expand the understanding of Snowballing by showing that its challenges are not limited to student factors but also involve teacher competence and instructional management (Dawoud et al., 2020). These findings complement previous research emphasizing the importance of teacher preparation in cooperative learning. The challenges identified in this study should consequently be viewed as implementation conditions rather than weaknesses of the method itself (Salem et al., 2023). When teachers understand the procedure, establish clear roles, manage time effectively, and provide differentiated support, the obstacles can potentially be reduced and the collaborative potential of Snowballing can be strengthened.

This finding contributes a more critical understanding of Snowballing by identifying the interaction between student ability, participation patterns, instructional time, and teacher facilitation. Schools should provide teacher training

on cooperative-learning facilitation, develop differentiated reading support, establish clear group roles, and allocate sufficient instructional time for multi-stage discussion. Future studies should examine intervention strategies for reducing participation inequality, investigate teacher-training models for Snowballing, and test the method across different Arabic proficiency levels and educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Snowballing method provides a structured and collaborative approach to Arabic language learning among Grade XI students at MAS Darul Arifin. Its implementation progressed systematically from individual reading, to paired discussion, and finally to larger-group interaction. This process encouraged students to construct understanding through active participation, information exchange, and collaborative discussion. The method also contributed to increased student engagement, motivation, confidence, and interaction during Arabic learning. Nevertheless, its implementation was influenced by several inhibiting factors, particularly differences in reading ability, limited instructional time, students' initial shyness and lack of confidence, unequal participation, difficulties in understanding materials independently, and teachers' limited mastery of facilitation techniques. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of Snowballing depends not only on its procedural structure but also on appropriate classroom management and teacher facilitation.

Based on these findings, the Snowballing method has practical and pedagogical significance for the development of Arabic language education. Teachers can utilize this method to create more interactive learning environments while simultaneously developing students' reading comprehension, communication, confidence, and collaborative learning skills. However, implementation should be accompanied by differentiated support, balanced group formation, clear discussion roles, effective time management, and continuous teacher guidance. Schools should also strengthen teachers' competence through training in cooperative learning and classroom facilitation. This study contributes to the understanding of Snowballing as a flexible instructional approach that integrates individual comprehension with collaborative learning. Future research is recommended to examine its effectiveness using quantitative, mixed-method, and longitudinal designs across different educational settings, student proficiency levels, and Arabic language skills.

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