

Arabic Vocabulary Learning through Podcast-Based Stimulation in Informal Pesantren Settings

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ABSTRACT

Arabic vocabulary mastery is a crucial foundation for language proficiency in Islamic educational contexts, particularly in pesantren where Arabic functions as both a subject of study and a medium of daily communication. However, vocabulary learning among non-native Arabic learners is often constrained by classroom-centered instruction and limited exposure in informal environments. This study aims to examine how podcast-based audio stimulation implemented in informal pesantren settings supports Arabic vocabulary learning and to explore learners' affective and behavioral responses to such stimulation. Adopting a qualitative research design with a naturalistic inquiry orientation, the study was conducted over a 12-week period at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. Data were collected through non-participant observations, learner reflections, and semi-structured interviews, and were analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that sustained exposure to Arabic podcasts in dormitory environments facilitates vocabulary development through gradual lexical noticing, increased familiarity with recurring lexical items, and emerging incidental use in peer interaction. In addition, learners demonstrated positive affective responses, characterized by reduced anxiety, sustained engagement, and tolerance of partial understanding. The study concludes that podcast-based stimulation functions effectively as incidental auditory input that enriches learners' lexical environment beyond formal instruction. By embedding Arabic exposure into daily routines, podcasts offer a complementary and low-pressure approach to vocabulary learning in pesantren contexts. The findings contribute to discussions on informal language learning and provide pedagogical insights for integrating digital audio media into Arabic language education without increasing instructional burden.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic vocabulary mastery constitutes a fundamental component of second and foreign language acquisition, particularly in Islamic educational contexts where Arabic functions not only as a subject of study but also as a medium for religious understanding and daily communication (Baharun et al., 2025; Hanifansyah et al., 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2025). In pesantren environments, vocabulary knowledge plays a decisive role in enabling students to comprehend classical texts, participate in oral interactions, and gradually internalize Arabic as a living language rather than a purely academic subject. Despite its centrality, vocabulary learning among non-native Arabic learners remains a persistent challenge, especially when instruction is heavily confined to formal classroom settings and textbook-based memorization (Habib, Masnun, et al., 2025; Lazuardi, 2025; Solehudin & Nur Hanifansyah, 2024).

In many pesantren, Arabic exposure is formally regulated through scheduled lessons, while informal spaces such as dormitories, peer interactions, and leisure time remain pedagogically underutilized (Nasution et al., 2024). This situation creates a gap between structured instruction and natural language use. Students may demonstrate adequate performance in written tests yet struggle to activate vocabulary spontaneously in everyday communication. Such a discrepancy suggests that vocabulary acquisition is not merely a matter of instructional content but also of exposure, frequency, and affective engagement within authentic communicative environments. Consequently, there is a growing need to explore instructional strategies that extend Arabic input beyond classrooms and into learners' daily lived spaces.

Recent studies have increasingly explored the pedagogical potential of podcasts as a digital audio medium in language education. Within Arabic language learning, podcasts have been recognized as a flexible and authentic source of auditory input that supports learners' engagement and language development. Several studies have demonstrated that podcast-based instruction can enhance learners' listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and affective readiness by providing repeated exposure to natural pronunciation, intonation, and discourse patterns.

Research conducted by Habib et al. (2025) shows that the integration of Arabic podcasts in pesantren contexts significantly improves students' listening and speaking skills while increasing motivation and engagement. Similarly, Idrisa et al. (2025) employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine graduate students' experiences with YouTube-based Arabic podcasts and found that repeated exposure to authentic spoken Arabic reduced speaking anxiety, strengthened confidence, and shifted learners' orientation toward meaning-making rather than grammatical perfection. These findings highlight podcasts as learner-controlled media that foster a low-anxiety environment conducive to oral language development.

Other studies have examined podcast integration within more structured instructional models. Shadady and Nisa (2025) for example, investigated podcast use within a blended learning framework and reported improvements in listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, and oral fluency among non-native Arabic learners. Their findings emphasize the value of podcasts as part of teacher-mediated and curriculum-based digital instruction. Likewise, research in EFL contexts, such as that conducted by Al-Mohawes, confirms that podcast-based audio input enhances listening performance and promotes positive learner attitudes through indirect and out-of-class exposure.

In addition, several studies have explored podcast media in relation to other language skills, including grammar and writing. Alemsyah et al. (2026) demonstrated that *imlā'*-based digital audio podcasts significantly improved students' mastery of basic Arabic grammar (*nahwu*) in formal classroom settings. Although these studies differ in focus, they collectively establish podcasts as a legitimate and effective digital medium in Arabic language education.

Despite the growing body of literature on podcast-assisted language learning, several gaps remain evident. First, most existing studies focus on productive skills such as speaking or receptive skills such as listening comprehension, while vocabulary acquisition is often treated as a secondary or supporting outcome rather than a primary analytical focus. Second, podcast use is predominantly examined within formal or semi-formal instructional settings, including classrooms, blended learning environments, or

structured teaching programs, where learning activities are guided by teachers and linked to explicit learning tasks.

Third, limited attention has been paid to informal learning spaces, such as students' living environments in boarding schools, where language exposure occurs naturally and incidentally as part of daily routines. The majority of prior studies emphasize measurable outcomes or instructional effectiveness, leaving underexplored the process-oriented dimensions of how learners notice, internalize, and begin to use new vocabulary through sustained auditory exposure without explicit instruction.

Finally, while affective factors such as motivation and anxiety reduction have been acknowledged, there is a lack of qualitative research that examines how low-pressure, non-instructional podcast exposure shapes learners' lexical awareness and vocabulary use over an extended period. These gaps indicate the need for research that shifts the analytical lens from instructional effectiveness to naturalistic vocabulary development in informal contexts.

Building on previous research, the present study advances the field by examining Arabic vocabulary learning through podcast-based stimulation in informal pesantren settings, specifically within students' dormitory environments. Unlike earlier studies that situate podcasts within formal instruction or blended learning models, this study conceptualizes podcasts as a form of incidental auditory input embedded in learners' everyday lives rather than as a structured teaching tool.

The novelty of this study lies in three key contributions. First, it foregrounds vocabulary acquisition as the central analytical focus, moving beyond listening and speaking outcomes. Second, it investigates podcast use in informal living spaces, where exposure is continuous, natural, and free from evaluative pressure. Third, by adopting a qualitative approach, the study captures the processes of lexical exposure, noticing, and emergent use, offering insight into how vocabulary develops gradually through repeated, low-anxiety auditory stimulation.

By positioning podcast-based stimulation as a complementary ecological layer of language exposure rather than a formal instructional method, this study extends current discussions on podcast-assisted language learning and informal education. It contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how digital audio media can support sustainable vocabulary development in Islamic boarding school contexts and enrich the broader discourse on incidental language learning in Arabic education.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining Arabic vocabulary learning through podcast-based stimulation in informal pesantren settings. Specifically, the research focuses on how structured yet flexible audio exposure, implemented in students' dormitory environments, supports vocabulary acquisition over time. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does podcast-based audio stimulation in informal pesantren spaces influence students' Arabic vocabulary development? and (2) How do students respond affectively and behaviorally to podcast-based vocabulary stimulation in their daily learning environment?

The scope of this research is limited to vocabulary acquisition through auditory exposure and does not aim to measure broader language skills such as grammar mastery or writing proficiency. Additionally, the study is conducted within a single pesantren context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Nevertheless, this focused scope allows for an in-depth exploration of vocabulary learning processes within a naturalistic and culturally specific environment.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theoretical and pedagogical discussions on Arabic language learning. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on informal language learning and incidental vocabulary acquisition by providing empirical evidence from a pesantren context. Pedagogically, the study offers practical insights for educators seeking to integrate digital audio media into daily learning routines without disrupting existing instructional structures. By positioning podcast-based stimulation as a complementary rather than substitutive approach, this research contributes to the development of sustainable and context-sensitive strategies for enhancing Arabic vocabulary learning in Islamic boarding schools.

2. METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a naturalistic inquiry orientation to explore Arabic vocabulary learning through podcast-based stimulation in informal pesantren settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The study is theoretically informed by concepts of incidental vocabulary learning, auditory input exposure, and informal language learning, which emphasize that lexical development emerges through repeated, meaningful exposure in low-anxiety environments rather than through explicit instruction alone.

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah, an Islamic boarding school where Arabic is used both instructionally and communicatively. The pesantren dormitory was deliberately selected as the research site because it represents an informal learning space in which students naturally encounter Arabic beyond classroom boundaries (Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024). This setting enabled the researcher to examine vocabulary learning as it occurred organically within students' daily routines.

The participants consisted of selected students residing in the pesantren dormitories who regularly engaged with Arabic audio exposure through podcast listening. Data sources in this qualitative study included classroom-independent observations (Bostic et al., 2021), learner reflection notes, informal interviews (Deterding & Waters, 2021), and documentation related to podcast implementation. These sources allowed for an in-depth exploration of learners' experiences, responses, and perceived vocabulary development.

Data collection was carried out over a 12-week period. During this phase, Arabic podcasts containing high-frequency vocabulary, short dialogues, and everyday expressions were played regularly in dormitory settings during non-classroom hours. The researcher conducted non-participant observations to document students' listening behaviors, interaction patterns, and spontaneous vocabulary use. In addition, learners' reflective responses and brief interviews were collected to capture their perceptions of podcast-based stimulation in relation to vocabulary learning.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Lochmiller, 2021; Naeem et al., 2023; Thompson, 2022). The analysis followed iterative stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Observational notes, interview excerpts, and learner reflections were coded to identify recurring themes related to vocabulary exposure, lexical noticing, engagement, and learning motivation. Triangulation across multiple data sources was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical approval was obtained from the institution, and participants were informed of the research purpose. All data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and podcast activities were integrated into existing routines without disrupting students' daily responsibilities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings of the study derived from systematic observations, students' reflective responses, and qualitative interviews conducted during the 12-week implementation of Arabic podcast-based stimulation in informal pesantren spaces, particularly students' dormitory rooms at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. The presentation of results focuses exclusively on data that are directly relevant to the research questions.

3.1 Vocabulary Exposure and Lexical Noticing in Informal Spaces

Observational data indicate that the regular playback of Arabic podcasts in students' dormitory rooms created sustained and repetitive exposure to target vocabulary in a low-pressure environment. Unlike formal instructional settings, students were not required to memorize word lists, take notes, or complete vocabulary exercises. Instead, vocabulary input was encountered incidentally as part of their daily routines, such as resting, casual conversation, or preparing for other activities.

Over time, students began to demonstrate lexical noticing, reflected in their spontaneous recognition of frequently occurring words and expressions heard in the podcasts. This noticing was not immediately

manifested in explicit definitions or metalinguistic explanations but rather in students' ability to identify familiar lexical items when they reappeared in subsequent podcast episodes or in peer interactions. Several students were observed reacting verbally to recurring words, occasionally repeating them aloud or asking peers about their meanings, indicating an emerging awareness of lexical patterns.

Furthermore, instances of vocabulary uptake were observed in students' everyday conversations. Although the usage was often partial, context-dependent, and sometimes structurally incomplete, it signaled the early stages of lexical internalization. Students tended to adopt high-frequency verbs, common nouns, and short formulaic expressions that were repeatedly emphasized in the audio input. These lexical items appeared in casual exchanges, jokes, or brief responses, suggesting that vocabulary learning occurred not as isolated knowledge but as functional language use embedded in social interaction.

The findings suggest that Arabic vocabulary acquisition in this context progressed in a gradual and implicit manner. Rather than demonstrating immediate mastery, students showed incremental development characterized by recognition, partial use, and increasing familiarity with lexical forms. This pattern indicates that podcast-based stimulation functioned primarily as a source of continuous auditory input that supported vocabulary development through repeated exposure and natural engagement, rather than through explicit instruction or conscious memorization.

3.2 Learners' Engagement and Affective Responses to Podcast-Based Stimulation

Interview data reveal that students generally responded to the podcast-based stimulation with positive affective attitudes and minimal learning-related anxiety. Most participants perceived the podcasts not as an additional academic burden but as a natural part of their daily dormitory environment. Because the audio was integrated into shared living spaces rather than formal instructional sessions, students did not associate podcast listening with evaluation, obligation, or performance pressure.

Several students explicitly described the experience as relaxed and non-intrusive:

"Listening to the podcast in the dormitory feels relaxed. I don't feel like I am studying, but I slowly recognize new Arabic words." (Student A)

"Sometimes I don't understand everything, but after hearing the same words many times, I start to remember their meaning." (Student C)

"Because it is played in the room, it feels natural. We listen while resting or talking with friends." (Student F)

These responses indicate that the affective dimension of learning played a central role in shaping students' engagement with the podcasts. Rather than striving for immediate comprehension, students appeared comfortable with partial understanding and gradual familiarity. This tolerance for ambiguity allowed them to remain engaged with the audio input over time without experiencing frustration or disengagement.

Behaviorally, students demonstrated passive yet sustained engagement. They continued to listen to the podcasts during routine activities and rarely attempted to avoid or silence the audio. In some instances, students were observed repeating familiar words, echoing short phrases, or commenting casually on expressions they recognized. Such behaviors suggest that engagement was not limited to listening alone but extended to light interaction with the linguistic input.

Overall, the findings suggest that podcast-based stimulation contributed to a **supportive emotional climate** that facilitated ongoing exposure to Arabic vocabulary. By reducing learning-related pressure and framing vocabulary input as part of everyday life, the podcasts enhanced students' readiness to attend to and process new lexical items.

3.3 Emergence of Incidental Vocabulary Use in Peer Interaction

Beyond vocabulary recognition and affective engagement, field observations documented the emergence of incidental vocabulary **use** in peer interactions among students. Although the use of newly encountered vocabulary was not systematic or consistently accurate, it represented a meaningful transfer from auditory input to spoken language practice.

Students were observed incorporating words and short expressions heard in the podcasts into casual conversations, jokes, and brief responses to peers. These lexical items were typically high-frequency verbs,

common nouns, or formulaic expressions that had appeared repeatedly in the audio materials. In many cases, students used the words appropriately within the conversational context, even when grammatical forms were incomplete or simplified.

This pattern of usage indicates that vocabulary acquired through podcast-based stimulation was functional and usable, rather than merely recognized. The fact that students attempted to use new words spontaneously without prompting from teachers or structured exercises—suggests that the vocabulary had begun to integrate into their active linguistic repertoire.

Importantly, the observed vocabulary use was characterized by experimentation and approximation. Students appeared willing to test new words in interaction, sometimes correcting themselves or being informally corrected by peers. Such behavior reflects an early developmental stage of vocabulary acquisition in which communicative intent takes precedence over formal accuracy.

These findings highlight that podcast-based audio stimulation not only supported vocabulary exposure and recognition but also facilitated the initial transition from receptive knowledge to productive use. Although still limited in scope and accuracy, the incidental use of vocabulary demonstrates the potential of informal auditory input to foster emerging lexical competence in everyday communicative contexts.

The findings of this study demonstrate that podcast-based audio stimulation in informal pesantren settings plays a meaningful role in supporting Arabic vocabulary learning through sustained exposure, lexical noticing, and emergent use. Regular exposure to Arabic podcasts in students' dormitory environments enabled learners to encounter target vocabulary repeatedly without explicit instructional demands. This pattern aligns with previous studies that highlight the effectiveness of podcasts as sources of authentic auditory input in Arabic language learning (Habib et al., 2025; Idrisa et al., 2025). However, while earlier research predominantly situates podcast use within formal or semi-formal instructional contexts and emphasizes listening or speaking outcomes, the present study extends these findings by showing that vocabulary development can also emerge through unstructured, incidental exposure embedded in daily living spaces.

The observed process of lexical noticing, in which students gradually recognized recurring words and expressions, supports psycholinguistic perspectives on incidental vocabulary learning. Similar tendencies were reported by Shadady and Nisa (2025), who found that repeated exposure to podcast content within blended learning environments enhanced vocabulary retention. Unlike their teacher-mediated approach, the present study demonstrates that lexical awareness can develop even in the absence of explicit tasks or instructional scaffolding. This suggests that the frequency and contextual richness of auditory input may be sufficient to trigger early stages of vocabulary acquisition, particularly in environments where learners are continuously surrounded by the target language.

The findings also underscore the importance of informal learning spaces in Arabic language education. Previous research on pesantren-based learning has largely focused on classroom instruction and curricular innovation (Nasution et al., 2024; Hanifansyah et al., 2025), often overlooking how language exposure unfolds in students' everyday environments. By situating podcast stimulation in dormitory spaces, this study highlights the pedagogical potential of informal contexts as sites of lexical development. The continuous and natural nature of exposure in these settings appears to bridge the gap between formal instruction and spontaneous language use, supporting vocabulary learning as an ongoing and embedded process rather than a classroom-bound activity.

Affective responses emerged as a central factor shaping learners' engagement with podcast-based stimulation. Consistent with previous findings that podcasts reduce anxiety and enhance learner confidence (Idrisa et al., 2025; Al-Mohawes, 2023), students in this study perceived podcast listening as relaxed and non-evaluative. This low-pressure environment allowed learners to tolerate partial understanding and engage with unfamiliar vocabulary without fear of error. While earlier studies have linked affective comfort primarily to improvements in speaking performance, the present findings indicate that similar emotional conditions also facilitate vocabulary awareness and readiness to experiment with new lexical items.

The emergence of incidental vocabulary use in peer interaction further reinforces the value of podcast-based auditory input. Students were observed incorporating newly encountered words into casual conversations, even when usage remained incomplete or approximate. This pattern resonates with earlier studies reporting increased communicative experimentation following podcast exposure (Shadady & Nisa, 2025), as well as research on digital audio media supporting learner confidence across language skills (Alemsyah et al., 2026). Unlike test-based studies that emphasize measurable gains, the present findings highlight vocabulary learning as a gradual and exploratory process in which communicative intent precedes formal accuracy. Such approximation reflects an early developmental stage of lexical acquisition, where learners actively negotiate meaning through social interaction.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by reframing podcasts not merely as instructional tools but as sources of ambient auditory input that support vocabulary development in informal learning ecologies. While previous research establishes the pedagogical value of podcasts within structured learning models, the present findings demonstrate that sustained, low-pressure exposure in everyday environments can foster lexical awareness and emergent use over time. This perspective broadens current understandings of podcast-assisted Arabic language learning and underscores the importance of integrating digital audio media into learners' daily routines as a complementary layer of language exposure rather than a replacement for formal instruction.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined Arabic vocabulary learning through podcast-based stimulation in informal pesantren settings, focusing on how sustained auditory exposure in students' dormitory environments supports lexical development and how learners respond affectively and behaviorally to such stimulation. The findings indicate that podcast-based audio exposure, when embedded naturally into daily routines, contributes to vocabulary learning through gradual lexical noticing, emergent use, and positive affective engagement. Vocabulary development in this context did not occur as immediate mastery but as a progressive process characterized by recognition, approximation, and increasing functional use.

The study also demonstrates that informal learning spaces play a significant role in extending Arabic language exposure beyond classroom boundaries. By integrating podcasts into non-instructional environments, learners encountered Arabic in a low-pressure and non-evaluative context, which fostered sustained engagement and tolerance of partial understanding. This affective condition enabled learners to remain receptive to new vocabulary and to experiment with lexical items in peer interaction without fear of error. Such findings underscore the importance of viewing vocabulary learning not solely as a classroom-based activity but as a continuous process shaped by everyday exposure and social interaction.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on incidental vocabulary learning and informal language education by providing empirical evidence from a pesantren context. It highlights the role of ambient auditory input in supporting lexical development and extends existing discussions on podcast-assisted language learning by shifting the focus from instructional effectiveness to ecological language exposure. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that podcast-based stimulation can serve as a complementary strategy for Arabic vocabulary development, allowing educators to enrich students' linguistic environment without adding curricular burden or disrupting established instructional practices.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its focus on a single pesantren context and its emphasis on qualitative data. As such, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other educational settings. Future research is encouraged to explore similar podcast-based interventions across diverse pesantren or educational contexts, to examine long-term vocabulary retention, and to combine qualitative insights with quantitative measures of lexical development. Further studies may also investigate how different podcast genres, levels of lexical complexity, or learner proficiency levels influence vocabulary acquisition in informal learning environments.

In conclusion, podcast-based audio stimulation offers a promising and sustainable approach to enhancing Arabic vocabulary learning in pesantren contexts. When positioned as a complementary layer

of language exposure rather than a formal instructional tool, podcasts can contribute meaningfully to learners' lexical development by embedding Arabic into the rhythms of everyday life.

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