

Effectiveness of an Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme among Islamic Studies Students in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Arabic reading competency is a fundamental requirement for Islamic Studies students because most academic references are written in Arabic. However, many first-year undergraduates encounter difficulties in comprehending Arabic texts despite having prior exposure to the language. To address this issue, the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme was implemented as an intensive induction programme introducing the ISTIQRAA' strategic reading model. The programme aimed to equip students with systematic reading strategies that were continuously practised throughout a fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills course. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the programme using authentic assessment evidence collected during the course. A quantitative programme evaluation design was employed involving 96 first-year Islamic Studies students enrolled in the Arabic Language Skills course at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). Programme effectiveness was evaluated using Course Quality Improvement (CQI) data comprising reading and writing assessments, oral communication, presentations, peer assessment, listening assessment and e-portfolio, supported by students' post-programme feedback. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise students' performance across the assessment components. The findings indicated that students demonstrated satisfactory achievement in Arabic reading competency, oral communication and reflective learning through authentic assessment activities implemented throughout the semester. The findings suggest that the one-day enhancement programme functioned as an instructional catalyst by introducing the ISTIQRAA' strategic reading model, while sustained practice through authentic learning activities over fourteen weeks contributed to students' competency development. The study highlights the value of integrating strategic reading instruction with authentic assessment as a practical approach to strengthening Arabic language learning in higher education.

Keywords: Arabic reading competency, ISTIQRAA', authentic assessment, programme evaluation, Arabic language teaching, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic occupies a unique position within Islamic education because it functions not merely as a foreign language but as the primary medium through which Muslims access the Qur'an, Hadith, classical Islamic scholarship, and contemporary academic writings. Consequently, proficiency in reading Arabic texts is regarded as one of the essential competencies for students enrolled in Islamic Studies programmes. Higher education institutions offering Islamic Studies therefore expect incoming students to possess adequate reading skills that enable them to engage independently with authentic Arabic references (Aladdin & Sahrir, 2021; UNESCO, 2023).

Despite years of formal Arabic instruction in Malaysian schools, numerous studies continue to report that students experience considerable difficulties in reading authentic Arabic texts once they enter university. The problem is particularly evident among first-year undergraduates who frequently struggle with vocabulary recognition, syntactic analysis, contextual interpretation, and inferential comprehension. Their reading process

often remains dependent on word-for-word translation rather than strategic comprehension, resulting in slow reading, low confidence, and reduced motivation to engage with Arabic academic sources (Ismail & Abdul Rahman, 2023; Sahrir et al., 2021; Al-Jarf, 2023).

This situation creates a significant challenge for lecturers because most university courses require students to analyse classical and contemporary Arabic references independently. Weak reading competency subsequently affects students' academic performance across multiple Islamic disciplines, including Qur'anic Studies, Hadith, Shariah, Usuluddin, Dakwah, and Islamic Education. Previous research has demonstrated that the transition from school-based Arabic learning to university-level academic reading requires explicit instruction in strategic reading and comprehension skills rather than relying solely on linguistic knowledge or grammar instruction (Nik Mohd Rahimi et al., 2022; Al-Qahtani, 2022). Recent evidence further suggests that effective Arabic reading requires learners to integrate cognitive, metacognitive and schema-based strategies that enable them to construct meaning actively rather than depending on literal translation (Ali & Ab Rahman, 2025).

In response to these challenges, the Faculty of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), organised the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme for newly enrolled Islamic Studies students during the 2024/2025 academic session. The programme aimed to strengthen students' Arabic reading competency through explicit training in the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model, a structured instructional model developed to facilitate systematic reading through the sequential phases of *Istitla'*, *Tafkir* and *al-Qira'ah al-Muta'ammiah*. During the enhancement programme, students were introduced to these strategic reading techniques before applying them continuously throughout the subsequent fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills course. The model emphasises purposeful reading, cognitive activation, analytical text processing and reflective learning as foundations for developing independent Arabic reading competency. The model was developed by synthesising principles from cognitive theory, metacognitive theory and schema theory into a systematic instructional framework specifically designed for Arabic reading among non-native learners (Ali & Ab Rahman, 2025).

Unlike conventional orientation programmes, the enhancement programme functioned as an instructional induction that introduced students to the ISTIQRAA' strategic reading model before the commencement of formal coursework. Students subsequently practised the strategies throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills course while completing authentic learning tasks, including text analysis, oral reading, presentations and e-portfolios. Continuous practice through authentic learning activities enabled students to apply the ISTIQRAA' reading strategies in meaningful academic contexts rather than merely learning the strategies theoretically. Such continuous reinforcement is considered essential for developing independent and reflective readers (Ali & Ab Rahman, 2025). Programme effectiveness was evaluated using authentic assessment evidence and Course Quality Improvement (CQI) records collected during the semester, complemented by students' feedback on the usefulness of the programme. Unlike conventional orientation programmes, this intervention specifically focused on developing students' strategic reading abilities before they commenced formal university courses.

Although many universities organise language enhancement activities for new students, empirical evaluations of structured Arabic reading intervention programmes remain relatively limited, particularly within higher education institutions. Moreover, little empirical evidence is available regarding strategic reading programmes grounded in an integrated theoretical framework and evaluated through authentic assessment practices embedded within regular university courses (Ali & Ab Rahman, 2025). Existing studies have predominantly focused on classroom-based instruction, vocabulary acquisition, or grammar teaching, whereas intensive strategic reading programmes conducted during students' transition into university have received comparatively less scholarly attention (Al-Jarf, 2023; Ismail & Abdul Rahman, 2023). Consequently, there remains a need to examine whether short-term strategic intervention programmes can effectively improve Arabic reading competency among university students.

Therefore, this study evaluates the effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme implemented at UniSZA. Specifically, the study addresses the following research objectives:

1. To determine the effectiveness of the programme in improving Arabic reading skills among first-year Islamic Studies students.
2. To examine students' perceptions regarding the usefulness of the programme.
3. To discuss the implications of strategic reading intervention programmes for Arabic language instruction in higher education institutions.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Arabic language pedagogy, particularly in relation to programme-based strategic reading interventions in higher education. Practically, the study provides evidence that may assist curriculum developers, Arabic language instructors, and higher education institutions in designing more effective academic support programmes to strengthen Arabic literacy among Islamic Studies students. Furthermore, the findings support the broader agenda of improving graduates' readiness to engage critically with authentic Arabic sources throughout their university education and future professional practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arabic Reading Competency in Higher Education

Reading is widely recognised as the cornerstone of academic learning because it enables students to acquire disciplinary knowledge, evaluate scholarly arguments, and construct higher-order thinking skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Nation, 2009). In the context of Islamic Studies, Arabic reading competency assumes an even more significant role as students are expected to access, interpret, and critically analyse authentic Arabic sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, classical jurisprudential literature (*fiqh*), *tafsir*, *usul al-fiqh*, and contemporary Islamic scholarship (Aladdin & Sahrir, 2021). Consequently, Arabic reading competency extends beyond linguistic proficiency and represents an essential academic competency for successful learning throughout higher education.

Despite more than a decade of formal Arabic instruction in Malaysian schools, numerous studies consistently report that many students continue to experience considerable difficulty in comprehending authentic Arabic texts upon entering university (Sahrir et al., 2021; Ismail & Abdul Rahman, 2023). These difficulties are commonly associated with limited vocabulary knowledge, inadequate grammatical awareness, weak inferential comprehension, and an overreliance on literal translation strategies (Al-Qahtani, 2022; Al-Jarf, 2023). Although students may possess sufficient knowledge of Arabic morphology (*ṣarf*) and syntax (*naḥw*), they frequently struggle to integrate these linguistic elements into meaningful comprehension when reading extended academic texts.

The transition from secondary education to higher education further intensifies these challenges. At university level, students are expected to independently analyse complex Arabic references across various Islamic disciplines, including Qur'anic Studies, Hadith, Shariah, Dakwah, and Islamic Education. However, many students enter higher education without sufficient strategic reading skills required for academic literacy (Nik Mohd Rahimi et al., 2022). This transition gap suggests that Arabic reading instruction should extend beyond conventional grammar-based teaching towards instructional approaches that explicitly cultivate strategic reading behaviours, analytical thinking, and independent comprehension.

Recent developments in reading pedagogy support this perspective by conceptualising reading as an active cognitive process rather than a passive decoding activity. Effective readers continuously activate prior knowledge, predict textual content, monitor comprehension, identify relationships between ideas, and evaluate information throughout the reading process (Afflerbach et al., 2017; Grabe & Stoller, 2020). Accordingly, strategic reading instruction has emerged as an important pedagogical approach for strengthening academic reading competency in higher education.

These findings suggest that successful Arabic reading should not be viewed merely as the mastery of vocabulary and grammar, but as an active process requiring learners to employ appropriate reading strategies that facilitate meaning construction (Ali & Ab Rahman, 2025).

Strategic Reading Theory

Strategic reading refers to readers' conscious and purposeful use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies before, during, and after reading to facilitate comprehension (Piaget, 1970; Goodman, 1971; Afflerbach et al., 2017). Unlike traditional approaches that emphasise vocabulary memorisation and grammatical explanation, strategic reading encourages learners to interact actively with texts through prediction, questioning, monitoring comprehension, summarising, and reflection (Grabe & Stoller, 2020).

Ali and Ab Rahman (2025) argued that Arabic reading is a complex cognitive activity involving the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, metacognitive regulation, and schema activation. Rather than relying on literal translation, effective readers actively construct meaning by predicting textual content, monitoring comprehension, activating prior knowledge, and reflecting upon the information obtained from the text.

Research in Arabic language education has consistently demonstrated that systematic instruction in reading strategies enhances students' comprehension of Arabic texts and supports more effective processing of authentic reading materials (Nik Farhan et al., 2010; Nurazan, 2015; Ali & Ab Rahman, 2025). Readers who receive systematic instruction in reading strategies generally exhibit stronger inferential reasoning, improved text organisation skills, and greater confidence in interpreting unfamiliar texts.

Within Arabic language education, however, instructional practices remain predominantly teacher-centred and translation-oriented (Al-Jarf, 2023). Although grammatical instruction remains essential, linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient to ensure successful comprehension of authentic Arabic texts. Instead, students require explicit guidance in applying strategic reading processes that integrate lexical knowledge, syntactic analysis, contextual interpretation, and reflective evaluation.

In Malaysian higher education, strategic reading has gained increasing attention because it provides an effective mechanism for bridging students' transition from school-based learning to university academic literacy (Sahrir et al., 2021; Suhaila et al., 2025). Students who actively employ prediction, questioning, summarisation, and self-monitoring strategies consistently demonstrate stronger comprehension and greater confidence when engaging with Arabic academic references. These findings indicate that strategic reading instruction should become an integral component of academic enhancement programmes designed for newly enrolled university students.

Schema Theory as the Foundation of Strategic Reading

Schema Theory provides one of the most influential theoretical explanations for reading comprehension. Initially introduced by Bartlett (1932), further developed by Rumelhart (1980), and subsequently applied to second language reading by Carrell (1983), the theory explains that readers construct meaning by integrating new textual information with their existing knowledge structures, commonly referred to as schemas.

According to Schema Theory, reading comprehension extends beyond recognising vocabulary or grammatical structures. Rather, readers actively construct meaning by drawing upon their prior linguistic knowledge, conceptual understanding, cultural experiences and contextual expectations (Anderson, 2018). The activation of appropriate schemas before and during reading therefore facilitates deeper comprehension, more accurate inference and more effective integration of new information. These strategic behaviours are closely associated with metacognitive regulation, whereby learners consciously plan, monitor and evaluate their own reading processes (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Metacognitive strategy instruction enables learners to regulate their comprehension more effectively through planning, monitoring and evaluating their reading performance (Chamot, 2005). Such strategic behaviours also promote learner autonomy by encouraging students to become active and self-directed readers (Oxford, 1990).

Within Arabic language learning, schema activation becomes particularly important because authentic Arabic texts frequently contain unfamiliar vocabulary, sophisticated syntactic structures and culturally embedded concepts (Al-Jarf, 2023). Students who fail to activate relevant linguistic, conceptual and content schemas often

experience fragmented comprehension despite recognising individual lexical items. Similarly, Ali and Ab Rahman (2025) argued that effective comprehension of Arabic texts depends on learners' ability to activate formal schemata, content schemata and linguistic schemata in order to connect new information with existing knowledge.

Empirical evidence further supports the effectiveness of schema activation in Arabic reading instruction. Al-Qahtani (2022) demonstrated that structured pre-reading activities activating grammatical and semantic knowledge significantly enhanced students' comprehension of academic Arabic texts. Similarly, Sahrir et al. (2021) found that activating learners' prior knowledge before reading improved both reading accuracy and learner engagement. Consistent with these findings, Ali and Ab Rahman (2025) emphasised that schema activation enables learners to establish meaningful relationships between textual information and prior knowledge, thereby strengthening strategic reading and deeper text comprehension.

These findings suggest that schema activation constitutes one of the fundamental cognitive processes underpinning strategic reading. Consequently, Schema Theory provides an important theoretical foundation for the development of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model, particularly in facilitating learners' systematic engagement with authentic Arabic texts.

The ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model

Building upon the theoretical synthesis proposed by Ali and Ab Rahman (2025), the present study adopts the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model as its pedagogical framework. The model operationalises the principles of cognitive, metacognitive and schema theories into a systematic instructional sequence specifically designed to enhance Arabic reading competency among non-native learners.

Unlike general reading strategy models, ISTIQRAA' was specifically designed to address the linguistic and cognitive demands of Arabic reading. The model consists of four interconnected instructional phases: language stimulation, *Istitle'* (initial survey), *Tafkir* (thinking and questioning), *al-Qira'ah al-Muta'ammiqah* (deep reading), and reflection. Each phase systematically scaffolds students' reading process from activating prior knowledge to constructing deeper textual understanding. The instructional sequence reflects the conceptual framework proposed by Ali and Ab Rahman (2025), whereby effective Arabic reading is achieved through the integration of cognitive processing, strategic regulation, and prior knowledge activation within meaningful learning contexts.

During the *Istitle'* phase, students develop an initial understanding of the text by identifying titles, recurring vocabulary, and general themes. The subsequent *Tafkir* phase encourages learners to activate prior knowledge, formulate questions, generate predictions, and establish purposeful reading objectives before engaging with the text. Finally, *al-Qira'ah al-Muta'ammiqah* requires students to analyse paragraph structures, identify main and supporting ideas, interpret contextual meanings, and synthesise information before completing reflective learning activities.

Compared with conventional translation-oriented instruction, the ISTIQRAA' model promotes active meaning construction through systematic interaction with authentic Arabic texts. By integrating linguistic knowledge with strategic reading behaviours, the model encourages learners to become independent readers capable of interpreting complex academic texts critically and systematically. These characteristics make ISTIQRAA' particularly appropriate for first-year Islamic Studies students who must transition rapidly into university-level academic reading.

Authentic Assessment in Reading Instruction

Contemporary educational assessment has shifted from measuring isolated knowledge towards evaluating learners' ability to apply knowledge and skills within authentic learning contexts (Wiggins, 1998; Mueller, 2018). In language education, authentic assessment provides more comprehensive evidence of students' competency because it evaluates actual performance through meaningful academic tasks rather than relying solely on conventional written examinations.

Authentic assessment in Arabic language learning may include oral reading, text analysis, presentations, collaborative discussions, reflective writing, and portfolio development. These assessment methods evaluate not only textual comprehension but also students' ability to communicate ideas, organise information, apply reading strategies, and reflect upon their learning processes. Ali and Ab Rahman (2025) further argued that reading strategies should not remain theoretical constructs but should be translated into authentic learning activities that enable students to demonstrate comprehension, critical analysis, and reflective thinking within actual academic settings.

In the present study, programme effectiveness was evaluated through authentic assessment embedded within the Arabic Language Skills course. Students continuously applied the ISTIQRAA' strategic reading model while completing reading comprehension tasks, oral presentations, peer assessment, and e-portfolio activities that were systematically documented through the Course Quality Improvement (CQI) system.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study was guided by a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationship between the programme intervention, instructional implementation, assessment practices and learning outcomes. The framework proposes that the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme serves as the initial intervention by introducing students to the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model. The model is subsequently implemented throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills course, enabling students to engage continuously in strategic reading activities during teaching and learning sessions.

The effectiveness of the instructional implementation is evaluated through authentic assessment and supported by institutional course evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) evidence. Collectively, these processes provide comprehensive evidence of students' learning achievement and programme effectiveness in enhancing Arabic reading competency. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning the present study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Evaluating the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme

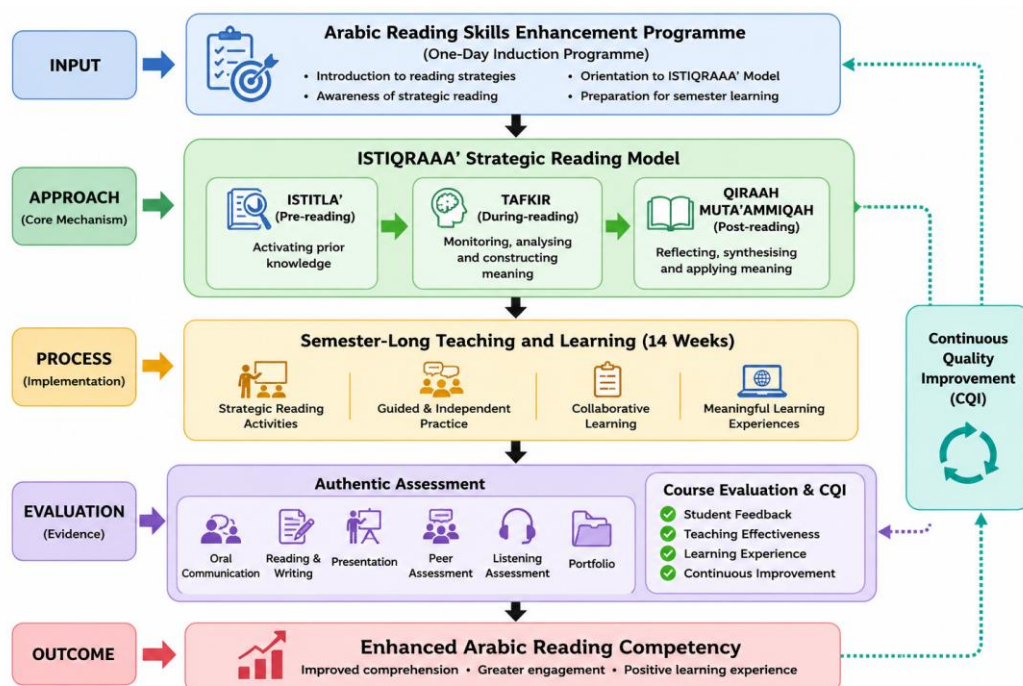


Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning this study. The Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme functioned as the initial intervention by introducing the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model to students before the commencement of regular instruction. The model was subsequently implemented throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills course through structured strategic reading activities. Students' learning outcomes were evaluated using authentic assessment, while the overall effectiveness of the programme was further supported by institutional course evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) evidence.

The framework demonstrates that the enhancement of Arabic reading competency is achieved through the systematic integration of programme intervention, strategic reading instruction, continuous learning activities and multiple evaluation mechanisms.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of Arabic reading competency, strategic reading instruction, and schema activation in improving language learning, several important research gaps remain.

First, existing studies have primarily focused on classroom-based Arabic language instruction, vocabulary acquisition, and grammatical competence, whereas relatively limited attention has been given to structured strategic reading intervention programmes specifically designed to support students during their transition into higher education (Al-Jarf, 2023; Ismail & Abdul Rahman, 2023).

Second, many studies have evaluated reading achievement using conventional written tests or students' self-perceptions. Comparatively fewer investigations have employed multiple authentic assessment approaches that comprehensively evaluate learners' ability to apply strategic reading skills through oral reading, presentations, reflective learning, collaborative assessment, and portfolio development within authentic instructional settings (Mueller, 2018; Wiggins, 1998).

Third, while Schema Theory and strategic reading have been widely recognised as important theoretical foundations for reading instruction, relatively few empirical studies have translated these theories into an integrated pedagogical model specifically designed for Arabic language learning among non-native learners. Existing reading strategy frameworks provide valuable general guidance; however, they are not specifically tailored to address the linguistic complexity of Arabic texts and the academic needs of Islamic Studies students.

Fourth, empirical evidence concerning the implementation and evaluation of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model in higher education remains scarce. In particular, little is known about how strategic reading techniques introduced through an intensive induction programme can be reinforced through continuous authentic learning activities and evaluated systematically using Course Quality Improvement (CQI) evidence throughout an academic semester.

Fifth, although Ali and Ab Rahman (2025) proposed a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining the theoretical foundations of Arabic reading strategies, empirical evidence validating the implementation of these theoretical principles through a structured instructional model remains limited. In particular, little is known about how strategic reading instruction can be introduced through an intensive enhancement programme, reinforced throughout a semester, and evaluated using authentic assessment embedded within regular university courses.

Therefore, the present study addresses these gaps by evaluating the effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme based on the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model using authentic assessment evidence derived from Course Quality Improvement (CQI) records and students' programme feedback. By doing so, the study contributes theoretically to the development of strategic Arabic reading pedagogy and provides practical evidence for designing structured academic support programmes that strengthen Arabic reading competency among first-year Islamic Studies students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive programme evaluation design to evaluate the effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme implemented among first-year Islamic Studies students at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). The evaluation focused on examining students' learning achievement and perceptions following their participation in the programme and the subsequent implementation of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model throughout the Arabic Language Skills (DWZ10202) course.

Rather than evaluating the one-day enhancement programme in isolation, the present study evaluated a structured instructional intervention in which students were first introduced to the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model during the enhancement programme and subsequently applied the same reading strategies continuously throughout the fourteen-week semester. Programme effectiveness was therefore determined based on students' performance in authentic learning activities, Course Quality Improvement (CQI) records and students' end-of-course evaluations.

Research Context and the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme

The Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme was organised by the Faculty of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), at the beginning of Semester I of the 2025/2026 academic session for newly enrolled Islamic Studies students. The programme was designed to facilitate students' transition into university-level Arabic reading by equipping them with systematic strategic reading skills before formal instruction commenced.

During the one-day programme, students received explicit instruction in the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model, which consists of three sequential phases: *Istitle'* (pre-reading exploration), *Tafkir* (analytical thinking) and *al-Qira'ah al-Muta'ammiah* (deep reading). These instructional activities aimed to develop students' ability to activate prior knowledge, analyse textual information critically and construct meaning systematically when reading authentic Arabic texts.

Following the enhancement programme, students continuously applied the ISTIQRAA' strategies throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills (DWZ10202) course. The strategies were embedded within regular teaching and learning activities, including guided reading, text analysis, oral reading, presentations, written assignments and reflective e-portfolios. Accordingly, the enhancement programme functioned as an instructional induction that initiated a semester-long process of strategic reading development.

Participants

The participants comprised 96 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), during Semester I of the 2025/2026 academic session. All participants attended the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme before enrolling in the Arabic Language Skills (DWZ10202) course.

Initially, 97 students were registered for the course. However, one student withdrew before completing the semester and therefore did not have complete assessment records. Consequently, only 96 students with complete learning records were included in the final analysis.

Since the enhancement programme involved the entire cohort of newly enrolled students, the study employed total population sampling, whereby all students with complete data were included in the programme evaluation.

Data Sources and Instruments

The effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme was evaluated using three institutional data sources.

The first source comprised students' authentic assessment results obtained from the Arabic Language Skills (DWZ10202) course. These assessments measured students' application of Arabic reading skills through various learning activities conducted throughout the semester, including reading comprehension, text analysis, oral presentations, written assignments and e-portfolios.

The second source consisted of the Course Quality Improvement (CQI) report, which documented students' achievement of the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) based on authentic assessments conducted during the

semester. The CQI report provided systematic evidence of students' learning performance and achievement after applying the ISTIQRAA' strategic reading model throughout the course.

The third source was the University Course Evaluation Report, which was administered at the end of the semester as part of the University's quality assurance process. The evaluation collected students' perceptions regarding the course learning outcomes, learning activities, assessment and teaching after they had completed the entire learning process. A total of 96 students completed the evaluation. Although the instrument was developed to evaluate the course rather than the enhancement programme specifically, it provided valuable supporting evidence regarding students' overall learning experiences following participation in the programme.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in three sequential stages. During the first stage, newly enrolled students participated in the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme, where they received explicit instruction on the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model.

During the second stage, the strategic reading model was continuously implemented throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills (DWZ10202) course. Students applied the reading strategies in various authentic learning activities designed to strengthen their Arabic reading competency.

In the final stage, students' authentic assessment results, CQI reports and University Course Evaluation Reports were collected after the completion of the semester. These data represented students' overall learning achievement and perceptions after continuously applying the ISTIQRAA' strategic reading model throughout the course.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Students' authentic assessment results, CQI records and University Course Evaluation data were summarised using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations to describe the effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme.

In addition, students' written comments contained in the University Course Evaluation Report were reviewed descriptively to complement the quantitative findings and to provide further insights into students' learning experiences following the implementation of the programme.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing educational research. Participation in the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme formed part of the University's academic enhancement initiative and regular teaching and learning activities. Data used in this study were analysed and reported in aggregate form without identifying individual participants. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data analysis and reporting processes. The findings are presented solely for academic purposes and to support continuous programme and curriculum improvement.

RESULTS

Students' Achievement Across Authentic Assessment Components

The effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme was evaluated based on students' achievement in authentic assessments conducted throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills (DWZ10202) course. Rather than relying solely on a final examination, students' learning was assessed through multiple authentic assessment components that reflected the continuous application of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model in different learning contexts.

Table 1. Students' Achievement Across Authentic Assessment Components

Assessment Component	Full Marks	Mean Score	Achievement (%)
Oral Communication (<i>Al-Muhadathah</i>)	10	6.71	67.1
Reading and Writing Assessment (<i>Al-Imtiḥan fī al-Qira'ah wa al-Kitābah</i>)	30	21.13	70.4
Language Task / Presentation (<i>Al-Mahammah al-Lughawīyyah</i>)	10	8.79	87.9
Peer Assessment	10	9.42	94.2
Listening Assessment (<i>Al-Ikhtibār fī al-Istima'</i>)	10	7.04	70.4
Portfolio	30	26.05	86.8

Students demonstrated satisfactory achievement across all authentic assessment components. The highest achievement was recorded in Peer Assessment (94.2%), followed by the Language Task/Presentation (87.9%) and Portfolio (86.8%). These findings indicate that students were able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the semester in collaborative, individual and performance-based learning activities.

Students also achieved satisfactory performance in the Reading and Writing Assessment (70.4%) and Oral Communication (67.1%), suggesting that they were able to comprehend, analyse and communicate ideas from Arabic texts after continuously practising the ISTIQRAAA' strategic reading model throughout the course.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' achievement was consistently distributed across various authentic assessment tasks rather than being concentrated in a single assessment component. This reflects the continuous development of Arabic reading competency through sustained learning experiences during the semester.

Students' Perceptions of the Learning Experience

Students' perceptions of the learning experience were examined using the University Course Evaluation Report administered at the end of the semester. The evaluation measured students' perceptions of the course learning outcomes, learning activities, assessment practices and teaching after they had completed the Arabic Language Skills course.

Table 2. Students' Evaluation of the Course

Evaluation Aspect	Mean
Course Evaluation	4.72
Teaching Evaluation	4.75
Overall Mean	4.74

The results indicate a high level of students' satisfaction with the overall implementation of the course. Both the Course Evaluation (M = 4.72) and Teaching Evaluation (M = 4.75) recorded high mean scores, resulting in an overall mean score of 4.74. These findings suggest that students responded positively to the learning activities, assessment approaches and instructional practices implemented throughout the semester.

Students' written comments further supported these quantitative findings. Most respondents expressed appreciation for the learning experience and acknowledged the lecturer's guidance throughout the course. Several comments also reflected students' awareness of the importance of continuous reading practice in improving their Arabic language proficiency.

Overall, the authentic assessment results and students' evaluation of the course provide complementary evidence that the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme, together with the semester-long implementation of the

ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model, contributed positively to students' learning experiences and Arabic reading development.

DISCUSSION

Continuous Strategic Reading Practice Enhanced Arabic Reading Competency

The findings indicate that students demonstrated satisfactory achievement across all authentic assessment components after participating in the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme and subsequently applying the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model throughout the fourteen-week Arabic Language Skills course. From a cognitive perspective, continuous engagement with authentic reading tasks enables learners to assimilate and accommodate new linguistic knowledge into existing cognitive structures (Piaget, 1970). These findings suggest that the improvement in students' achievement was not solely attributable to the one-day enhancement programme. Rather, the programme served as an initial intervention that introduced students to strategic reading techniques, while continuous practice throughout the semester reinforced the application of these strategies in authentic learning situations.

This finding is consistent with Strategic Reading Theory, which emphasises that effective reading develops through the conscious use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies before, during and after reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Afflerbach et al., 2008). Skilled readers actively monitor comprehension, make predictions, infer meaning and evaluate textual information during the reading process rather than merely decoding individual words (Grabe & Stoller, 2020). This supports the view that reading is an interactive psycholinguistic process in which learners actively construct meaning through continuous interaction with textual information (Goodman, 1971). Consequently, continuous engagement with meaningful reading tasks enables learners to internalise these strategies and become increasingly independent readers.

The satisfactory performance observed across authentic assessment components further supports this interpretation. Students demonstrated the ability to apply strategic reading not only in reading and writing assessments but also in oral communication, presentations and portfolio tasks. These findings support previous studies reporting that explicit strategic reading instruction contributes positively to reading comprehension, learner autonomy and overall academic achievement (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Grabe & Stoller, 2020). Similarly, Ali and Ab Rahman (2025) argued that systematic implementation of strategic reading activities enables learners to transfer reading strategies across different language learning contexts.

The Role of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model in Schema Activation

The effectiveness of the programme can also be interpreted through the perspective of Schema Theory, which explains that reading comprehension occurs when readers integrate new textual information with their existing knowledge structures (Bartlett, 1932; Carrell, 1983). Rather than relying solely on lexical translation, effective readers activate linguistic, conceptual and experiential knowledge to construct meaning from the text (Anderson, 1994).

The ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model operationalises this process through three sequential phases, namely *Istitle'* (pre-reading), *Tafkir* (during-reading) and *Qiraah Muta'ammiah* (post-reading). These phases encourage learners to activate prior knowledge before reading, monitor comprehension during reading and consolidate understanding through reflection and application after reading. Such a sequence aligns closely with Schema Theory, which emphasises the interaction between prior knowledge and new textual information in developing meaningful comprehension (Carrell, 1983).

The authentic assessment findings suggest that students were able to extend these strategic reading processes beyond literal comprehension. Their satisfactory achievement in presentations, portfolios and reading assessments indicates that learners successfully integrated comprehension with communication, analysis and reflective learning. These findings provide empirical support for the conceptual framework proposed by Ali and

Ab Rahman (2025), who argued that effective Arabic reading instruction should integrate strategic reading with schema activation to develop independent and critical readers.

Implications for Arabic Language Instruction in Higher Education

The findings of this study have several important implications for Arabic language instruction in higher education. First, strategic reading instruction should be introduced systematically at the beginning of students' academic programmes rather than being taught incidentally within individual lessons. Previous research has consistently shown that early exposure to strategic reading promotes reading confidence, comprehension and learner autonomy (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Afflerbach et al., 2008).

Second, the findings demonstrate the educational value of integrating strategic reading instruction with authentic assessment. Performance-based assessments, including oral presentations, portfolios and peer assessment, provide opportunities for students to demonstrate meaningful application of reading strategies beyond traditional written examinations. This approach is consistent with the principles of authentic assessment, which emphasise evaluating students' ability to apply knowledge and skills in realistic learning situations (Gulikers et al., 2004; Wiggins, 1998).

Finally, the study highlights the importance of embedding programme evaluation within Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) practices. The combination of authentic assessment evidence and institutional course evaluation provides a more comprehensive understanding of programme effectiveness, thereby supporting evidence-based curriculum enhancement and continuous improvement in Arabic language education.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The present study contributes to Arabic language education from both theoretical and practical perspectives. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the application of Strategic Reading Theory and Schema Theory by demonstrating how both theories can be operationalised through the ISTIQRAAA' Strategic Reading Model within an authentic higher education learning environment. While previous studies have emphasised the importance of strategic reading in improving reading comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Bernhardt, 2011), the present study illustrates how strategic reading can be systematically integrated into a semester-long Arabic language course through structured learning activities and authentic assessment.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study proposes a practical instructional framework in which an initial enhancement programme is followed by continuous implementation of strategic reading throughout regular classroom teaching. The findings suggest that students' reading competency develops not merely through short-term intervention but through sustained engagement with strategic reading practices embedded within teaching, learning and assessment activities. This approach provides a structured model that can be adapted by lecturers teaching Arabic language courses in higher education institutions.

Practically, the study also demonstrates the value of integrating authentic assessment with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) processes when evaluating educational programmes. Rather than relying solely on students' examination performance, programme effectiveness was examined using multiple sources of evidence, including authentic assessment and institutional course evaluation. Such an approach provides richer evidence for curriculum review and supports evidence-based decision-making in programme enhancement.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Arabic language pedagogy by offering an integrated framework that combines strategic reading instruction, authentic assessment and continuous programme evaluation to strengthen Arabic reading competency among Islamic Studies students in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme implemented among Islamic Studies students in a higher education institution. The findings indicate that students achieved

satisfactory performance across various authentic assessment components while reporting positive learning experiences throughout the Arabic Language Skills course. Collectively, the authentic assessment results and institutional course evaluation provide evidence that the programme successfully supported the development of students' Arabic reading competency.

The findings further suggest that the effectiveness of the programme should not be attributed solely to the one-day enhancement workshop. Rather, the workshop functioned as an initial intervention that introduced students to the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model, which was subsequently reinforced through continuous implementation over a fourteen-week semester. The integration of strategic reading instruction with authentic assessment enabled students to apply reading strategies in meaningful learning contexts while progressively strengthening their comprehension and overall language performance.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Arabic language pedagogy by demonstrating how Strategic Reading Theory and Schema Theory can be operationalised through the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model in higher education. Unlike many previous studies that primarily focused on short-term reading interventions or isolated reading instruction, the present study illustrates the value of embedding strategic reading practices within regular teaching, authentic assessment and continuous quality improvement processes. This integrated approach provides a practical framework for enhancing Arabic reading instruction while supporting evidence-based curriculum improvement.

Despite these encouraging findings, this study was conducted within a single higher education institution involving one cohort of Islamic Studies students. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings to other educational settings. Future research may examine the implementation of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model across different universities, academic disciplines and learner proficiency levels. Longitudinal and comparative studies may also provide further evidence regarding the sustainability of students' reading development over time.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the Arabic Reading Skills Enhancement Programme, supported by the systematic implementation of the ISTIQRAA' Strategic Reading Model, offers a practical and sustainable approach for strengthening Arabic reading competency in higher education. The integration of strategic reading instruction, authentic assessment and continuous programme evaluation provides valuable guidance for educators and curriculum developers seeking to improve Arabic language teaching and learning in contemporary higher education contexts.

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