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Enhancing Arabic Writing and Literacy through Ibda' Magazine: A Culturally Relevant Medium in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

Keywords:

Arabic Writing Skills; Authentic Learning; Islamic Boarding School; Literacy Development; Student Magazine; In Arabic language education, Writing remains one of the most essential yet underdeveloped skills in Arabic language education, particularly among non-native learners who may master grammatical rules but often struggle to produce coherent and expressive texts. This study investigates the impact of Ibda' Magazine, a culturally relevant and student-centered print publication, on enhancing Arabic writing skills and literacy among 60 third-year Tsanawiyah students at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research draws on thematic analysis of student writings, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with learners and instructors. The findings reveal a marked improvement in vocabulary richness, grammatical precision, narrative organization, and stylistic fluency. More critically, the magazine fostered a deeper sense of authorship, engagement, and confidence among students, as they wrote for authentic audiences beyond the classroom. The use of Ibda' Magazine not only bridged the gap between formal instruction and real-world application but also transformed writing from a mechanical task into a reflective and expressive practice. These outcomes highlight the pedagogical value of culturally embedded, print-based media in advancing Arabic writing instruction within Islamic educational contexts.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:

Keterampilan Menulis Bahasa Arab; Majalah Siswa; Pedagogi Autentik; Pengembangan Literasi; Pondok Pesantren Dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab, keterampilan menulis merupakan salah satu aspek yang paling penting namun seringkali kurang berkembang, terutama bagi pembelajar non-Arab yang telah menguasai kaidah gramatikal tetapi masih kesulitan menghasilkan tulisan yang koheren dan ekspresif. Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak penggunaan Majalah Ibda', sebuah media cetak yang kontekstual dan berpusat pada siswa, dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis dan literasi bahasa Arab di kalangan 60 santri kelas tiga Tsanawiyah Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. Dengan pendekatan Achmad Makki Lazuardi, Nur Hanifansyah, Menik Mahmudah, Iqmal Wahyudi.

	deskriptif kualitatif, data diperoleh melalui analisis tematik terhadap tulisan siswa, observasi kelas, serta wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan siswa dan guru. Temuan menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan dalam kekayaan kosakata, ketepatan gramatikal, organisasi narasi, dan keluwesan gaya penulisan. Lebih jauh, keterlibatan siswa dalam majalah ini mendorong tumbuhnya rasa kepemilikan, partisipasi aktif, dan kepercayaan diri dalam menulis karena mereka menulis untuk audiens nyata di luar kelas. Penggunaan Majalah Ibda' tidak hanya menjembatani kesenjangan antara pembelajaran formal dan penerapan nyata, tetapi juga mentransformasi kegiatan menulis dari tugas mekanis menjadi praktik reflektif dan ekspresif. Hasil ini menegaskan nilai pedagogis dari media cetak yang kontekstual dalam memperkuat pengajaran keterampilan menulis bahasa Arab di lingkungan pendidikan Islam.
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INTRODUCTION

In the context of Arabic language education, writing is often regarded as the most challenging productive skill, especially for non-native learners. While students may succeed in mastering grammar and vocabulary in isolation, they frequently struggle to apply these elements in coherent, meaningful compositions. This issue reflects not only a gap in instructional strategy but also the absence of authentic mediums that connect language use to students' lived experiences and cultural identities.

Despite ongoing efforts to reform Arabic instruction, the teaching of writing remains underrepresented in many curricula. Al Sharoufi (2022) and Mehdi (2024) argue that educational frameworks often emphasize mechanical writing practices such as sentence pattern drills at the expense of expressive, audience-oriented tasks. As a result, while students may develop grammatical proficiency, they frequently lack engagement with the communicative and creative dimensions of Arabic writing. Firdaus and Baroroh (2025) emphasized the need for innovative assessment tools targeting the creating level of Arabic writing to foster critical and original student output. Similarly, Ardiansyah et al. (2024) demonstrated that the cooperative *Scramble* method significantly improved Arabic sentence writing skills among elementary students through structured, engaging activities. Both studies underscore the value of interactive and contextually relevant approaches in Arabic writing instruction principles echoed in the implementation of *Ibda' Magazine* as a student-driven writing medium.

In response to these challenges, several researchers have explored the use of digital tools to enhance writing instruction. Alsaied (2024) and Mahmoud (2023)

highlight the growing application of AI-based grammar correction technologies, which offer immediate feedback and scaffold student autonomy, Supporting this view, Solyman et al (2021) demonstrated that AI-based grammar correction tools provide immediate feedback, helping learners to recognize and correct their own mistakes, thus promoting greater autonomy in writing. Benanane et al (2024) propose the integration of serious games to stimulate student motivation and contextual learning, while Qedear et al (2024) introduce air-writing platforms that support kinesthetic engagement with Arabic script. Although these innovations yield promising outcomes, their effective implementation often presupposes robust digital infrastructure and a high level of technological literacy conditions that may not be readily available in Islamic boarding school environments.

In addition to technological innovations, it is important to recognize that deeper systemic and psychological challenges continue to hinder Arabic writing development. Al Sharoufi (2022) and Alhamami (2023) note that national curricula in many regions still prioritize mechanical drills over communicative composition, failing to support students in bridging the gap between rule-based writing and meaningful expression. These issues are echoed in diverse educational settings, from dialect-based instruction to Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha), suggesting a global disconnect between policy and practice.

Efforts to address this gap have led to the development of mediums like *IBDA'*, which aim to collect and refine Arabic texts for literacy support. This aligns with prior findings among Palestinian learners, where Arabic writing skills were often superficially treated within formal education systems (Al Aghar et al., 2023; Hassanein et al., 2022; Naghdipour, 2021; Nusair & Palmer, 2023; Palmer, 2023; Shendy, 2022). Previous studies such as Luthfi (2025) emphasized the value of integrating idiomatic and culturally contextual content in Arabic curricula, while A. El-Mniezel (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of personalized materials in enhancing Arabic acquisition. However, print-based creative media like *Ibda' Magazine* remain largely unexamined, indicating a gap this study aims to address.

Psychologically, writing anxiety remains a major obstacle. Adeshola and Adepoju (2024) and (2023) identify internal barriers such as low confidence, lack of ideas, and

difficulty in planning and revision. These factors contribute to a reluctance to engage in writing, especially in second-language contexts. More recent studies, such as Shafiee Rad & Jafarpour (2023) and Mahapatra (2024), propose experiential and student-centered approaches to help learners overcome these challenges, although practical classroom-based models remain limited.

In contrast, print-based approaches especially those that are culturally and contextually embedded remain underexplored in contemporary scholarship. Publications such as *Ibda' Magazine* offer students opportunities to write for real audiences, express their identities, and receive feedback from both peers and teachers. Unlike digital tools that often rely on automated correction, this magazine emphasizes human interaction, reflective writing, and localized themes rooted in students' everyday lives.

This study aims to fill the gap between overreliance on digital interventions and the need for accessible, culturally relevant writing mediums in Islamic educational settings. By analyzing the implementation and impact of *Ibda' Magazine* at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah, this research explores how print-based, studentauthored publications can enhance Arabic writing skills, literacy, and learner confidence offering an alternative pedagogical model grounded in authentic pedagogy and constructivist theory.

The key research question addressed is: How does Ibda' Magazine enhance students' Arabic writing skills and literacy? Which aspects of writing are most improved through their participation in the magazine? The study also seeks to identify which specific aspects of writing lexical, structural, or affective are most impacted through this approach.

This study is limited to analyzing the content of the first edition of Ibda' Magazine (Sha'ban–Shawwal) within an Islamic educational institution. It evaluates the educational value of the magazine by examining its structure, themes, and student contributions.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the pedagogical effectiveness of Ibda' Magazine as a culturally grounded and authentic medium for enhancing Arabic writing proficiency and literacy among students (Creswell & Creswell,

2020). The research was grounded in the theories of authentic learning (Herrington & Oliver, 2000) and constructivist pedagogy, particularly drawing on Vygotsky's (1980) sociocultural theory, both of which emphasize the importance of contextualized, meaningful, and student-centered learning experiences in second language acquisition (Lovell & Sherrington, 2020; Rahman, 2024; Yaghoubi & Farrokh, 2022).

The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah, an Islamic educational institution in East Java, Indonesia, known for its strong Arabic immersion programs. The focus was on students in the third year of the Tsanawiyah level, who had undergone formal Arabic instruction for at least three years. This group was selected due to their intermediate proficiency and active participation in producing the first edition of Ibda' Magazine, focusing on 60 third-year Tsanawiyah students who had received formal Arabic instruction for at least three years and actively contributed to the first edition of *Ibda' Magazine*.

The research took the form of a qualitative case study, centering on the students' experiences, writing processes, and written outputs as contributors to the magazine. Primary data were collected from several sources, including published student writings, in-depth interviews with five student contributors and two Arabic language teachers, observational field notes from classroom and extracurricular writing activities, as well as supporting documents such as editorial guidelines and teachers' written feedback on student drafts.

Data collection was conducted over a two-month period, during which the researcher engaged in sustained fieldwork within the school environment to observe writing-related activities and interact with participants in a natural setting, observing activities and interacting directly with participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded with informed consent. The selection of written texts for analysis was done purposively to ensure genre variety and linguistic richness. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns in vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, narrative structure, and stylistic expression. Additionally, affective aspects such as students' motivation and confidence in writing were examined based on their reflections during interviews. Lexical richness was assessed by analyzing the variety and specificity of vocabulary used across drafts and

final texts, coherence by examining paragraph transitions and narrative flow, while motivational indicators were derived from students' reflective statements during interviews and their voluntary participation in revision and publication.

Triangulation was applied by integrating data from student texts, interviews, and classroom observations to enhance the validity of findings (Santos et al., 2020). For example, classroom observations provided real-time insights into students' writing behaviors and interaction with the magazine process, which were then compared with students' reflective statements during interviews. This cross-verification helped confirm whether the observed improvements in writing fluency and confidence were also perceived by the students themselves. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including participant anonymity and voluntary involvement. By focusing on a specific student cohort in a culturally rich educational setting, this study offers a contextually grounded perspective on how *Ibda' Magazine* contributes to the development of Arabic writing skills and literacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Darullughah Wadda'wah (commonly referred to as Dalwa) has established itself as one of Indonesia's leading institutions for Arabic language education (Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024), recognized for its full-immersion environment, structured linguistic curriculum, and consistent participation in national Arabic competitions and academic forums particularly renowned for its immersive linguistic environment and emphasis on classical and modern Arabic proficiency. As part of its comprehensive language program, Dalwa integrates maharah kitābah (writing skills) as a fundamental pillar of Arabic mastery, viewing it not merely as a technical competence but as a vehicle for critical thinking, expression, and intellectual engagement. Through structured classroom instruction, guided writing sessions, and extracurricular initiatives such as the publication of student magazines (majallāt tālimiyyah), including Ibda' Magazine, the institution fosters sustained writing practices that emphasize original thought, personal reflection, and structured composition moving beyond rote memorization of sentence patterns toward meaningful language use. Dalwa's approach encourages students to internalize grammar and vocabulary by applying them in authentic contexts, such as composing essays, crafting personal reflections, and developing creative narratives (Nur Hanifansyah et al., 2024). Moreover, the pesantren's commitment to publishing students'

works instills a sense of purpose and audience in the learning process key components in developing writing fluency and confidence. Teachers at Dalwa not only correct linguistic errors but also mentor students in content development, coherence, and stylistic variation, thereby fostering holistic growth in writing. The institution's linguistic ecosystem anchored in Arabic communication both inside and outside the classroom provides students with continuous exposure and opportunities to refine their writing over time (Nur Hanifansyah et al., 2024; Solehudin et al., 2024). As such, Dalwa plays a pivotal role in shaping students who demonstrate not only structural competence in Arabic but also control of voice, sensitivity to tone, and the ability to adapt their writing to various genres indicators of expressive and confident written communication.



Picture 1. Ibda' Magazine to Improve Arabic Writing Skills Enhancing Arabic Writing Skills through Ibda' Magazine

The analysis of student contributions in *Ibda' Magazine* demonstrated observable improvement across multiple dimensions of Arabic writing, including lexical diversity, narrative coherence, syntactic accuracy, and stylistic variation Improvements were observed in lexical variety, sentence structure, paragraph organization, and overall coherence. For instance, in earlier drafts, students often used repetitive adjectives such as جید (beautiful) and جید (good), whereas in the published magazine texts, they began incorporating more precise expressions like رائع (amazing), ممتع (enjoyable), and ملهم

(inspiring). Additionally, their compositions evolved from loosely connected sentences to logically structured paragraphs with clear thematic progression. Many essays and opinion articles displayed a more logical narrative flow and incorporated purposeful rhetorical strategies, such as the use of rhetorical questions, repetition for emphasis, and culturally embedded expressions when compared to regular classroom assignments. This suggests that the magazine encouraged students to approach writing with greater care and creativity, consistent with the principles of authentic learning, where learners engage in meaningful tasks that promote ownership, reflection, and personal expression.

Qualitative data from interviews confirmed these findings. One student remarked:

"I felt more freedom when writing for the magazine. I could choose my own topic and learn how to structure my ideas in more natural Arabic."

An Arabic teacher also observed significant improvements, stating:

"Their writing in the magazine showed clear advancement compared to classroom work. They were more careful in selecting words and paid more attention to sentence structure."

In earlier writings, students tended to reuse generic terms like جميل and جميل. Post-intervention texts displayed expanded vocabulary such as رائع، مدهش، وممتاز, showing intentional lexical selection. This shift was validated through both textual analysis and teacher observations of word usage during classroom writing tasks.

Such statements indicate that the authentic nature of the magazine and the possibility of publication elevated students' motivation and awareness, pushing them to apply their linguistic skills more effectively.

Enhancing Arabic Writing Skills through Ibda' Magazine

The analysis of student contributions in *Ibda' Magazine* revealed notable progress in several core areas of Arabic writing: lexical variety, stylistic expression, and narrative coherence.

Lexical variety was observed through the increased use of synonyms, idiomatic expressions, and domain-specific vocabulary. For instance, prior to their involvement in

the magazine, students often relied on basic terms such as جيد (good) or جميل (beautiful) repeatedly across assignments. However, in the published articles, students began employing more nuanced words such as رائع،ممتاز to describe experiences, reflecting broader vocabulary acquisition.

Stylistic expression improved through the use of rhetorical devices, tone shifts, and sentence variety. A clear example can be seen in a student's article about their Ramadan experience. In early classroom essays, sentences tended to be formulaic, such as:

.ذهبت إلى المسجد وصليت التراويح

In the magazine version, however, the student wrote:

".في ليالي رمضان، كأنّ روحانية المكان تسحبني بلطف إلى رحاب المسجد، حيث تختلط أصوات الدعاء بعطر السكينة"

This shift demonstrates growth in descriptive ability, emotional resonance, and figurative language use.

Narrative coherence was assessed by analyzing paragraph flow and thematic unity. Initially, many students' compositions displayed fragmented or list-like sequences with abrupt transitions. After writing for *lbda'*, students were more capable of sustaining a central theme, using cohesive devices such as ثم، بعد ذلك، ولذلك and transitional expressions to structure their texts logically. This improvement aligns with authentic learning theory, which emphasizes meaningful, connected, and reflective learning experiences. The progression observed in students' writing reflects the tenets of constructivist learning, where learners build knowledge through meaningful experiences and social interaction. The iterative process of drafting, receiving feedback, and publishing aligns with the authentic learning framework by engaging students in real-world tasks with intrinsic value and relevance (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Mahmudah et al., 2025).

The authentic nature of *Ibda' Magazine* involving real publication, peer review, and creative freedom provided students with a sense of audience and purpose, core elements in the authentic learning framework. According to Herrington et al., authentic learning occurs when students solve real-world tasks within social contexts. In this study, writing for publication transformed passive knowledge into active performance,

encouraging students to reflect, revise, and express personal insights within formal Arabic conventions.

This shift from mechanical to meaningful writing was consistently observed across student samples. One student, whose previous classroom essays were limited to textbook-based prompts, produced a reflective article titled "يوم لا يُنسى في بيت جدي", integrating memory, emotion, and structure. The text displayed not only grammatical accuracy but narrative sophistication, suggesting that authentic learning environments empower students to write with greater investment and personal voice.

Strengthening Literacy and Motivation through Creative Expression

Beyond writing mechanics, Ibda' Magazine provided a space for students to express themselves through concrete, experience-based themes such as their daily routines in the pesantren, memorable moments during Ramadan, reflections on family life, and commentary on Islamic moral values within their communities. These creative opportunities contributed to a deeper sense of Arabic literacy, where students were not only writing correctly but also meaningfully.

One student reflected:

"Writing in the magazine made me feel part of the Arabic-speaking world. It gave value to what I wrote."

The freedom to choose genres and themes poetry, storytelling, reflections enabled students to personalize their writing while applying formal Arabic skillsThis experience aligns with constructivist learning theory, as students were not merely completing assignments but drawing upon their lived experiences such as daily pesantren life, religious practices, and personal reflections which they transformed into coherent and expressive Arabic compositions. This connection between content and context illustrates how meaningful learning occurred through authentic engagement with real-life narratives

In the context of Islamic boarding schools where digital access may be limited, Ibda' Magazine serves not merely as a publication, but as an instructional strategy that integrates reflective practice, peer engagement, and cultural expression positioning it as a contextualized solution to persistent gaps in Arabic writing instruction.

The findings of this study reinforce and extend previous concerns raised in the literature regarding the underrepresentation of Arabic writing literacy in curricular design. Unlike conventional curricula, which often emphasize grammar drills and prescriptive writing tasks, *Ibda' Magazine* offers a student-driven, expressive, and publication-oriented model that promotes authentic engagement with language. While many educational frameworks fail to offer comprehensive support for expressive writing, *Ibda' Magazine* emerges as a practical, contextually embedded response to such systemic gaps. The students' enhanced motivation, improved structural writing, and deeper engagement with Arabic expression reflect what several scholars have argued is lacking in governmental syllabi across various regions.

Previous studies have underscored the importance of combining assessment innovation and interactive strategies in Arabic writing instruction. Firdaus and Baroroh (2023) emphasized the need for writing assessment instruments that support students at the creating level, encouraging more critical and original output. Similarly, Ardiansyah et al. (2024) demonstrated that cooperative methods like the *Scramble* technique significantly enhance sentence-writing skills through active participation. In line with these perspectives, *Ibda' Magazine* offers a holistic model that fosters creativity, audience awareness, and self-expression, reinforcing the pedagogical impact of culturally relevant and student-authored media.

Moreover, this research responds directly to the psychological barriers highlighted by Javaid et al. (2023) and Adeshola and Adepoju (2024), such as writing anxiety, lack of confidence, and difficulty in idea generation. Through the creative and student-driven environment of *Ibda'*, learners overcame these internal blocks by writing for real audiences and engaging in iterative writing supported by peer and teacher feedback. The findings also affirm the potential of non-digital, embodied writing systems where students physically engage in handwriting, layout design, and publication processes which foster deeper cognitive involvement and personal investment in the writing task, such as the IBDA' model.

By situating *Ibda' Magazine* within the broader discourse of Arabic writing literacy reform, this study highlights how a localized, print-based initiative can directly

address both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of writing skill development areas often overlooked in large-scale curriculum design and educational policy.

The results of this study not only support but also extend prior research on the value of authentic and student-centered learning media by demonstrating how a printbased, student-authored publication can cultivate Arabic writing proficiency in contexts with limited digital infrastructure. As Qedear (2024) asserted, While interactive platforms like air-writing applications enhance learners' engagement and cognitive development through digital means, *Ibda' Magazine* achieves similar pedagogical outcomes through a non-digital format offering students a tangible and creative space to apply their Arabic writing skills in authentic and personally meaningful ways. While Ibda' Magazine is not digital, it serves a similar pedagogical function by offering students meaningful contexts to apply their writing skills and engage with the Arabic language dynamically.

In a similar vein, Benanane (2024) emphasized the role of serious games in making writing enjoyable and relevant. Ibda' Magazine mirrored this function through its creative and collaborative nature, which motivated students to write with purpose and pride.

Alsaied (2024) and Mahmoud et al. (2023) explored the integration of artificial intelligence in Arabic writing, particularly through automatic grammar correction. Although the magazine is not AI-based, its editorial workflow peer feedback, teacher review, and iterative revisions provided a human-centered version of this scaffolding, reinforcing grammar, style, and coherence in writing.

Moreover, the cultural and linguistic relevance of student writing in the magazine aligns with Luthfi's (2025) argument that Arabic instruction should incorporate idiomatic and contextual content. Students naturally included Islamic phrases, daily experiences, and localized expression in their writing thus internalizing Arabic as a living, expressive language rather than a purely academic subject. This integration of personal and cultural references reflects a deeper level of language ownership, where learners move beyond linguistic formality toward authentic and context-rich communication.

This research fills a gap in existing literature by highlighting the effectiveness of non-digital, creative media in Arabic writing instruction. Through student contributions

to Ibda' Magazine, the study documented improvements in lexical diversity, narrative coherence, stylistic fluency, and learner motivation demonstrating the pedagogical value of print-based, student-authored publications. While much of the current scholarship focuses on high-tech solutions, this study demonstrates that a printed, student-generated magazine can yield significant linguistic and motivational outcomes. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, Ibda' Magazine offers a culturally rooted, learner-driven model that complements and enriches formal language instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of Ibda' Magazine as a culturally relevant print medium in strengthening Arabic writing proficiency and literacy among third-year Tsanawiyah students at Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. Unlike conventional methods that focus on grammar drills and decontextualized exercises, the magazine engaged students in purposeful, expressive, and audience-oriented writing tasks. Through this medium, learners demonstrated measurable gains in lexical richness, syntactic accuracy, narrative coherence, and stylistic variation, while also exhibiting increased motivation and ownership of their writing. To expand the impact of this model, future studies are encouraged to examine its applicability across various educational levels, conduct comparative analyses with digital writing platforms, and implement longitudinal designs to evaluate sustained learning outcomes. By advancing such initiatives, Arabic language education can move toward more inclusive, culturally grounded, and experientially rich frameworks that cultivate both academic excellence and real-world communicative competence.

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382 Kalamuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab dan Kebahasaaraban Vol. 04, No. 2, July 2023

Achmad Makki Lazuardi, Nur Hanifansyah, Menik Mahmudah, Iqmal Wahyudi.

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Achmad Makki Lazuardi, Nur Hanifansyah, Menik Mahmudah, Iqmal Wahyudi.

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