



Vygotsky's Principles of Social Constructivism in Arabic Language Learning: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Arabic language learning requires instructional approaches that facilitate meaningful interaction and active learner participation, particularly in developing communicative competence. Although Vygotsky's social constructivist principles have been widely applied in language education, their specific application and empirical patterns in Arabic language learning remain insufficiently synthesized across the existing literature. This study examines the application of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist principles in Arabic language learning. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following PRISMA 2020 principles using Scopus, Google Scholar, and related databases. Studies published between 2015 and 2025 were screened based on predefined eligibility criteria, resulting in 15 studies for thematic synthesis. Data were organized according to research context, design, Vygotskian constructs, learning activities, language skills, findings, and limitations. The findings indicate that social interaction through group discussion, peer learning, and *muhadatsah* serves as the primary mechanism for engaging learners within their ZPD, particularly when interaction is purposeful and task-oriented. Speaking was the most frequently emphasized skill, followed by listening, whereas reading and writing received comparatively less attention. Teacher mediation through modelling, corrective feedback, and graduated scaffolding further supported learning development. Overall, Vygotskian principles provide a coherent framework for Arabic language instruction that emphasizes purposeful interaction, oral practice, and appropriately calibrated teacher support.

Keywords: Social Constructivism; Zone of Proximal Development; Scaffolding; Arabic Learning.

مستخلص البحث

يتطلب تعلّم اللغة العربية توظيف أساليب تعليمية تعزز التفاعل الهادف والمشاركة الفاعلة للمتعلمين، ولا سيما في تنمية الكفاءة التواصلية. وعلى الرغم من شيوع توظيف مبادئ البنائية الاجتماعية عند ليف فيغوتسكي في تعليم اللغات، فإن تطبيقها في مجال تعلّم اللغة العربية وأنماطها المستندة إلى الأدلة التجريبية لا تزال بحاجة إلى مزيد من التوليف والتحليل في الأدبيات العلمية القائمة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل تطبيق مبادئ فيغوتسكي في البنائية الاجتماعية، المتمثلة في التفاعل الاجتماعي، ومنطقة النمو القريب، والآخر الأكثر معرفة، والتسقيف التعليمي، في تعلّم اللغة العربية. وأُجريت مراجعة منهجية للأدبيات وفق مبادئ PRISMA 2020، بالاعتماد على قواعد بيانات Scopus و Google Scholar وغيرها من قواعد البيانات ذات الصلة. وخضعت الدراسات المنشورة خلال الفترة من ٢٠١٥ إلى ٢٠٢٥ للفرز وفق معايير أهلية محددة مسبقاً، وأسفر ذلك عن اختيار ١٥ دراسة للتحليل الموضوعي. ونُظمت البيانات وفق سياق البحث وتصميمه،

ومفاهيم فيغوتسكي، والأنشطة التعليمية، والمهارات اللغوية، والنتائج، والقيود. وأظهرت النتائج أن التفاعل الاجتماعي من خلال المناقشات الجماعية، والتعلم بالأقران، والمحادثة، يمثل الآلية الرئيسة لإدخال المتعلمين في منطقة نهمهم القريب، ولا سيما عندما يكون التفاعل هادفاً وموجهاً نحو المهام. وكانت مهارة التحدث الأكثر تناوُلًا، تلتها مهارة الاستماع، في حين حظيت مهارتا القراءة والكتابة باهتمام أقل نسبياً. كما أسهمت وساطة المعلم من خلال النمذجة، والتغذية الراجعة التصحيحية، والتسقيف التدريجي في دعم تطور التعلم. وتتلخص الدراسة إلى أن مبادئ فيغوتسكي توفر إطاراً متماسكاً لتعليم اللغة العربية، يقوم على التفاعل الهادف، والممارسة الشفوية، والدعم التعليمي المتدرج والمناسب مع احتياجات المتعلمين.

كلمات المفتاحية: البنائية الاجتماعية؛ منطقة النمو القريب؛ التسقيف التعليمي؛ تعلم اللغة العربية.

Introduction

Arabic occupies a central place in Islamic education and is increasingly positioned as a communicative rather than purely textual language. Yet in many Arabic-medium institutions, particularly pesantren, theoretical or grammatical mastery does not automatically translate into sustained, spontaneous communicative practice (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Nisa, 2018). This gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative competence is not primarily a problem of insufficient input; it reflects the fact that language development is fundamentally social. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory offers a framework for this problem precisely because it treats language as an interpersonal achievement first, one that is later internalized as individual cognition, rather than the reverse.

A growing body of Indonesian and regional scholarship has applied Vygotskian constructs to Arabic pedagogy, but the resulting evidence remains fragmented across contexts and constructs. Masrura et al. (2024) examine child Arabic development through a Vygotskian lens; Fatah et al. (2024) document collective interaction in a madrasah setting; Alamsyah et al. (2022) analyze the bi'ah lughawiyah (language environment) of an Arabic course as a socio-cultural artifact; Rahmawati (2023) isolates speaking instruction from a constructivist standpoint; and Kuncoro and Turahmat (2025) show how scaffolding structures ZPD-based literary-text learning. Complementary work situates these constructs within broader theoretical and applied concerns: Auliyalloh et al. (2025) and Aziz and Sanwil (2022) revisit constructivist learning theory and its application to Arabic instruction; Mohamad and Romli (2021) connect social constructivism to teachers' capacity to foster higher-order thinking; Widayat and Irham (2021) relate extraversion to Arabic competence within a social-constructivist frame; and Falah et al. (2025) analyze obstacles to forming a language environment from a Vygotskian perspective. Taken together, these studies converge on the general relevance of interaction and mediation but diverge in learning context, target population, targeted skill, and pedagogical implementation.

This divergence indicates that the research gap is methodological and integrative rather than a simple absence of studies. Individual publications tend to foreground a single dimension using different populations and settings, which

makes it difficult to determine whether these dimensions form a coherent, recurring pattern in Arabic learning or are context-specific artifacts of isolated studies. A systematic synthesis is therefore needed to establish which Vygotskian mechanisms recur across the literature and which language skills are most consistently associated with them. The present study addresses this gap by systematically synthesizing peer-reviewed and otherwise accessible evidence on Vygotskian principles in Arabic language learning.

The study is grounded in four interlocking Vygotskian constructs: social interaction as the origin of higher mental functions; the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as the space between independent and assisted performance; the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) as the agent who mediates that space; and scaffolding as the graduated support through which assistance is calibrated and progressively withdrawn (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976). In Arabic learning specifically, these constructs are not applied in the abstract but are operationalized through practices distinctive to Arabic pedagogy like *muhadatsah* (structured conversational practice), *halaqah* (small discussion circles), and *bi'ah lughawiyyah* (an immersive language-use environment) which give the sociocultural framework a concrete, observable form (Alamsyah et al., 2022; Habibah et al., 2023). The analysis therefore attends to how the sociocultural framework is enacted within Arabic-specific practice rather than assuming that findings generated in other second-language contexts transfer unchanged.

Three research questions guide the study: (1) How is social interaction represented across studies of Arabic learning informed by Vygotsky's principles? (2) Which Arabic language skills are most frequently reported to develop within this body of research? and (3) How is teacher-mediated support, including scaffolding and the MKO role, implemented, and how does it relate to reported learner development? Addressing these questions carries both theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, the synthesis clarifies how social interaction, skill development, and teacher mediation relate to one another within a single interpretive framework rather than being treated as independent findings. Practically, it identifies concrete pedagogical strategies that Arabic instructors can draw on when designing communicative curricula.

The study is deliberately confined to a systematic synthesis of peer-reviewed and otherwise accessible literature. This scope is a methodological choice rather than a limitation to be apologized for: it allows the review to establish, with reasonable transparency and reproducibility, which Vygotskian mechanisms recur across independently conducted studies of Arabic learning, before any single-context empirical extension is layered on top of that synthesis.

Method

Research Design

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design, following the PRISMA 2020 reporting principles for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021) and the thematic-synthesis approach for qualitative evidence proposed by Thomas and

Harden (2008). An SLR was chosen over a narrative review because the topic under investigation is represented in the literature by individually narrow studies that each foreground a single construct; a systematic, criterion-based procedure is required to determine whether these fragmented findings form a consistent, defensible pattern rather than a set of anecdotally similar observations. The review focused on two principal analytical domains established a priori: social interaction in Arabic learning, and the reported development of the four language skills (*istima', kalam, qira'ah, and kitabah*). A third, cross-cutting domain was added inductively during synthesis because it was repeatedly and independently identified across the reviewed literature, consistent with the iterative logic of thematic synthesis.

Formulating the Review Question and Eligibility Criteria

Following standard SLR procedure, eligibility criteria were defined before the search was conducted, using a PICOS-style framework adapted for an educational, non-intervention synthesis: population (learners and educators in Arabic-language learning contexts), phenomenon of interest (application of Vygotskian social-constructivist constructs), context (formal or non-formal Arabic instruction, including pesantren settings), outcomes (reported interactional, linguistic, or pedagogical outcomes), and study types (empirical studies of any qualitative, quantitative, or mixed design, plus relevant theses and indexed proceedings). Eligible studies had to: (a) address Arabic language education or a directly relevant language-learning context; (b) explicitly engage with Vygotsky, social constructivism, sociocultural learning, ZPD, or scaffolding; (c) report an identifiable educational or learning outcome; (d) be published within 2015–2025; and (e) be available in Indonesian, Arabic, or English. Studies were excluded when the full text was unavailable, the topic was unrelated to language learning, or Vygotskian/sociocultural concepts were mentioned only incidentally rather than substantively engaged. Purposive, criterion-based sampling was used to identify the documentary sample; the resulting corpus of 15 studies spans Indonesian pesantren, madrasah, and formal-school contexts, so that the synthesis is not confined to a single institutional setting.

Table 1. Literature Research Sample Criteria

Criterion	Specification
Publication Period	2015–2025
Field of Study	Arabic language education; learning psychology; Vygotsky's constructivist theory; social interaction in language learning; collaborative-based learning
Document Type	Indexed journal articles (SINTA, Scopus, DOAJ); educational seminar proceedings; dissertations or theses; fully accessible research reports
Topic Relevance	Application of Vygotsky's theory in language learning; social interaction and collaborative learning;

application of ZPD and scaffolding; improving Arabic language skills

Document Language Indonesian, Arabic, or English

Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across Scopus, Google Scholar, and other databases accessible to the research team, in line with PRISMA 2020 guidance to report all sources searched. The principal search concepts were combined using Boolean operators into the following string, applied with minor syntax adjustments across databases: (Vygotsky OR “social constructivism” OR sociocultural) AND (“Arabic language” OR “Arabic learning” OR Arabic) AND (interaction OR collaboration OR scaffolding OR “zone of proximal development” OR ZPD OR *muhadatsah*). Search terms were derived from the four Vygotskian constructs central to the review (social interaction, ZPD, MKO, scaffolding) together with Arabic-learning-specific terms (Arabic language, *muhadatsah*, *bi’ah lughawiyyah*), so that studies using either the general theoretical vocabulary or the Arabic pedagogical vocabulary would be captured. Database-specific syntax and the exact search date are recorded in the review’s search log and should be reported in full, together with the verified record counts, at the point of manuscript submission.

Study Selection Process

Study selection followed the four canonical PRISMA stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. In the identification stage, records were retrieved from each database and combined into a single working library; duplicate records were then removed using reference-management software. In the screening stage, titles and abstracts were read against the eligibility criteria above, and clearly irrelevant records were excluded. In the eligibility-assessment stage, the full text of each remaining record was read in full to confirm that it reported an identifiable Arabic-learning outcome and substantively engaged with a Vygotskian construct; records failing either condition were excluded at this stage, with the reason for exclusion recorded. In the inclusion stage, the remaining records constituted the final review corpus. This process yielded a final corpus of 15 studies that satisfied all eligibility criteria; this number is the outcome of the eligibility filters described above rather than a target set in advance. The exact counts at each PRISMA stage should be reported from the review team’s search and screening logs, and a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram generated from those verified figures, at the point of manuscript submission.

Data Extraction

Data extraction used a structured evidence matrix. For each of the 15 included studies, the researchers recorded publication year, context/participants, research design, the Vygotskian construct examined, the learning activity described, the language skill(s) addressed, the principal finding, and any limitations reported by the original authors. Where a study reported more than one construct or skill, each

relevant category was coded, allowing a single study to contribute evidence to more than one analytical domain.

Limitations of the Method

The study has several methodological limitations. First, the review is constrained by the databases, publication years, languages, and accessibility criteria used in the search, which may exclude relevant unpublished or non-indexed work. Second, the final corpus of 15 studies may limit the breadth of generalization and may reflect publication and database-selection bias, since studies reporting null or negative findings are less likely to be published. Third, thematic coding involves interpretive judgment even within a structured framework, and formal inter-coder reliability statistics were not computed. Fourth, most included studies used qualitative or small-scale descriptive designs, so the review synthesizes reported patterns and researcher interpretations rather than effect sizes, and findings should be read as a synthesis of the literature's claims rather than as independently verified causal evidence. Finally, several procedural details should be verified against the review team's search and screening records, and the corresponding PRISMA 2020 flow diagram generated from those records, before the manuscript is considered fully reproducible for publication.

Result and Discussion

The synthesis of the 15 included studies indicates a consistent association among social interaction, teacher-mediated support, and the development of Arabic communicative ability, although the strength and specific form of these relationships vary by learning context. Consistent with the thematic-synthesis procedure described in the Method section, the included studies were synthesized by theme rather than summarized one by one, so that patterns recurring across independently conducted studies could be distinguished from findings specific to a single context.

Social Interaction as the Heart of Language Acquisition

Across the reviewed studies, social interaction was repeatedly operationalized through group work, peer learning, dialogue, discussion, and *muhadatsah* (Fatah et al., 2024; Berliani et al., 2024). The recurring pattern is that learners receive language input and opportunities for output through interaction with teachers or more capable peers, which is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) claim that higher mental functions first appear on the interpersonal plane before being internalized. However, the reviewed studies differ in how interaction is structured: some emphasize peer collaboration (Sembiring, 2023), whereas others emphasize teacher-led mediation or the deliberate construction of a sustained Arabic-language environment (Alamsyah et al., 2022; Falah et al., 2025). This divergence suggests that the Vygotskian principle at work is not simply "more interaction produces more learning"; rather, effective interaction depends on purposeful tasks and access to appropriate mediation, a qualification that becomes visible only once findings are compared across studies rather than read individually.

The Arabic-learning context introduces practices that deserve explicit theoretical consideration. *Bi'ah lughawiyyah* and *muhadatsah* create repeated, structured opportunities for oral production and immediate feedback (Alamsyah et al., 2022; Habibah et al., 2023). These practices plausibly explain why speaking-related outcomes appear prominently in the reviewed evidence, but this pattern should not be read as proof that Arabic necessarily follows a universal speaking-before-writing developmental sequence. It more likely reflects the kinds of activities that communicative Arabic programs typically emphasize, a distinction with direct implications for curriculum design.

The synthesis further indicates that the ZPD becomes most visible precisely when interaction is accompanied by support from a teacher or a more experienced peer (Kuncoro & Turahmat, 2025). Collaboration alone is therefore insufficient: learners benefit when tasks are calibrated to their current competence and when support is gradually reduced as performance becomes more independent, consistent with Wood et al. (1976) original formulation of scaffolding as a contingent, fading process rather than a fixed level of help.

Teacher mediation across the reviewed literature commonly takes the form of modelling, corrective feedback, prompting, worked examples, and graduated assistance (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Mohamad & Romli, 2021). Scaffolding, in this respect, functions as the bridge between social participation and independent performance. The reviewed literature therefore supports an interpretation in which the teacher is not merely a transmitter of Arabic knowledge but a mediator who structures participation and progressively makes more complex language use accessible an MKO role in the strict Vygotskian sense rather than a purely instructional one.

Speaking as the Most Prominent Reported Outcome

Speaking or *muhadatsah* emerged as the most frequently emphasized language-skill outcome across the reviewed evidence, followed by listening (*istima'*), while reading (*qira'ah*) and writing (*kitabah*) were comparatively less prominent (Rahmawati, 2023; Salsabila & Muqowim, 2024). This pattern is consistent with the frequent use of dialogue, oral practice, peer interaction, and language-environment activities documented above, but it should be interpreted as a frequency pattern within the reviewed evidence rather than a universal causal sequence in which speaking necessarily precedes the other skills (Zubair, 2026).

Listening development is plausibly linked to the same interactional environments, since learners repeatedly receive spoken input as a by-product of oral activities. Reading and writing, by contrast, typically require additional and more explicit forms of literacy instruction like orthographic decoding, morphological analysis, and extended composition so their lower prominence in the reviewed studies more probably reflects the design of the interventions examined than any weaker theoretical compatibility between literacy and social constructivism (Habibah et al., 2023; Juita et al., 2024).

The SLR suggests that Vygotskian principles are frequently associated with

positive learning conditions and outcomes in Arabic education, particularly where interaction is structured and accompanied by mediation. The evidence assembled here, however, does not support the stronger claim that Vygotsky's framework is universally or experimentally proven to be superior to alternative approaches; it supports a more circumscribed claim about the conditions, drawn from the reviewed corpus, under which interaction becomes productive.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The integrated findings can be interpreted through three theoretical and practical propositions. *First*, interaction is most productive when it creates meaningful opportunities for Arabic use rather than interaction pursued for its own sake. *Second*, the prominence of speaking in the evidence appears connected to the communicative practices Arabic programs typically use, especially *muhadatsah* and *bi'ah lughawiyyah*, rather than to any intrinsic priority of speaking within Vygotskian theory. *Third*, teacher mediation determines whether collaborative activity functions as productive scaffolding or merely as unstructured group work.

Compared with studies that examine Vygotskian constructs individually, the present synthesis shows that social interaction, scaffolding, and the ZPD are better understood as interdependent mechanisms rather than separate variables. Social interaction provides the setting, scaffolding structures participation within that setting, and the ZPD explains why calibrated assistance enables performance that learners cannot yet achieve independently. The Arabic context adds culturally and pedagogically specific practices that give these otherwise general constructs concrete, observable form within Islamic educational settings (Firdaus et al., 2025).

Learning across the reviewed studies takes place in an Arabic-language environment both inside and outside the classroom, consistent with Vygotsky's account of the relationship between language and thought. This environment continuously encourages learners to speak and express themselves in Arabic through group work, peer guidance, discussion, and dialogue (*halaqah*). These activities keep learners within their ZPD, enabling them to accomplish tasks with the support of someone more knowledgeable that they could not yet accomplish independently.

The prominence of speaking also warrants a cautious reading. Arabic programs frequently use oral drills, *muhadatsah*, and interaction-rich environments, so speaking naturally receives substantial practice time. Reading and writing may require more explicit instruction in orthography, text structure, and extended composition; the lower prominence of these two skills in the reviewed evidence therefore need not indicate that they are theoretically secondary within a Vygotskian framework it more plausibly indicates that the reviewed interventions allocated more interactional time to oral language than to literacy.

This distinction helps explain an important contextual difference between Arabic learning and generic second-language learning: Arabic instruction typically combines communicative interaction with formal attention to script, morphology, syntax, and religious or academic texts. A Vygotskian framework can accommodate

these combined demands, but it requires teachers to adapt scaffolding to the specific linguistic demands of each skill rather than applying a single interactional strategy uniformly across speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

The practical implication is that teachers should design interaction around explicit learning goals, provide models and prompts, monitor learner performance, and gradually withdraw support as competence develops. Peer interaction can be strengthened through structured roles, paired practice, collaborative text work, and feedback cycles. For Arabic specifically, *muhadatsah* and *bi'ah lughawiyyah* can be deliberately integrated with reading and writing tasks so that oral interaction feeds into literacy development rather than being treated as a separate strand of instruction.

The reviewed literature supports the perceived importance of teacher guidance but does not, on its own, establish which specific scaffolding technique is superior. Future primary research should use validated instruments, direct proficiency measures, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to examine whether different forms of scaffolding produce different outcomes across the four Arabic skills, and whether the speaking-dominant pattern observed here persists when literacy-focused interventions are deliberately included in the sampled studies.

The evidence indicates that Vygotskian principles provide a useful, literature-grounded framework for interpreting Arabic language learning, particularly regarding the roles of interaction, mediation, and guided participation. The principal contribution of the present study is the systematic synthesis of these mechanisms across 15 independently conducted studies, rather than a claim of experimentally demonstrated effectiveness.

Conclusion

The reviewed evidence indicates that Vygotsky's social-constructivist principles are frequently associated with positive outcomes and supportive learning conditions in Arabic language education. Across the 15 studies included in this systematic review, social interaction, collaborative activities, language-environment practices, and teacher-mediated scaffolding repeatedly appear as important features of learning, despite variation in the specific populations and instructional settings examined.

Social interaction functions as a central mechanism through which learners receive language input, produce Arabic, collaborate with peers, and obtain assistance within the ZPD. Speaking or *muhadatsah* was the most prominent reported skill outcome across the reviewed studies, followed by listening, while reading and writing were less frequently emphasized. This pattern should be understood as a synthesis of the reviewed evidence rather than a universal developmental hierarchy that applies to all Arabic learners or all instructional contexts. The teacher's role is equally central, since interaction becomes pedagogically productive only when supported through modelling, feedback,

prompting, and graduated assistance. Across the corpus, this mediating role recurs as a necessary condition for collaborative activity to translate into measurable skill development, rather than an incidental feature of the settings studied.

The study therefore concludes that Arabic language instruction informed by Vygotskian principles should prioritize meaningful interaction, purposeful communicative practice, and structured scaffolding, while adapting support to the specific linguistic demands of speaking, listening, reading, and writing rather than assuming a single skill sequence applies uniformly. For practice, this implies deliberately designing *muhadatsah* and *bi'ah lughawiyah* activities alongside explicit literacy instruction. For research, future studies should strengthen the evidence base through a wider and more diverse literature corpus, transparent and fully reported PRISMA-compliant search procedures, and primary studies using validated instruments, direct proficiency measures, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to test the patterns identified in this synthesis.

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Author Contribution Statement

In the preparation of this article, HZ acted as editor, refining the entire manuscript, overseeing the research process, and approving the final version of the document. ZN conceptualized and designed the research, conducted the literature search and screening, extracted and synthesized the data, and wrote the initial draft of the manuscript. NN, JJ, RA, and MS contributed to study screening and coding, data interpretation, and the literature review. All authors have read and agreed to the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Using AI

The author used AI-assisted tools to improve the language quality, academic structure, and analytical depth of the manuscript during revision. All AI-assisted output was reviewed, fact-checked, and edited by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the content, including verification of all cited sources.

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