

Sociolinguistic Influences on Metalinguistic Competence among Teachers of Arabic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how sociolinguistic factors age, gender, and educational background shape the metalinguistic competence of Arabic language teachers in Jombang District, East Java. Using a quantitative correlational design, data from 19 teachers were examined across three domains: istima' or listening, tarakib or grammar, and qiro'ah or reading. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between age and overall metalinguistic competence ($r = 0.4979$), indicating that older teachers tend to demonstrate higher linguistic awareness. A Two-Sample t-Test showed no significant gender difference ($p = 0.333$), confirming that male and female teachers perform at comparable levels. Descriptive comparisons across educational backgrounds revealed domain-specific strengths. Teachers with course based training achieved the highest scores in listening or istima', suggesting that targeted instruction may enhance listening proficiency. In grammar or tarakib, teachers from university and islamic boarding school performed slightly higher than course, reflecting shared emphases on grammatical mastery. For reading or qiro'ah, university and islamic boarding school demonstrated identical mean scores, marginally exceeding Islamic boarding school, implying that reading competence may rely more on instructional approach than institutional type. Overall, age emerged as the most meaningful predictor of metalinguistic competence, while gender and educational background contributed only minor variations. These findings highlight the importance of cognitive maturity and focused linguistic instruction in strengthening teachers' metalinguistic awareness.

Keywords: Arabic Language Skills; Arabic Teacher Education; Educational Background; Linguistic Competence; Metalinguistic Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Metalinguistic competence has increasingly been recognized as one of the essential pillars that sustain high-quality language instruction. In language classrooms, especially in subjects as structurally rich and historically layered as Arabic teachers are required not only to communicate meaning but also to guide students through the intricate relationships among linguistic form, structure, and function. In this context, metalinguistic competence goes far beyond knowing how to use the language, it involves consciously analyzing and manipulating its building blocks, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Sinclair, 1986). This competence becomes indispensable when teaching Arabic, a language characterized by diglossia, deep morphological systems, and syntactic complexity across classical, modern standard, and colloquial varieties. When teachers possess strong metalinguistic awareness, they are far better equipped to identify learner challenges, address misconceptions, and translate linguistic rules into accessible explanations that students can internalize (Mousa & Yahya, 2022). Recent scholarship in *al-Lahjah*, including Sulaikho (2021), further emphasizes that teachers' metalinguistic sensitivity strongly predicts their ability to transform abstract linguistic rules into meaningful pedagogical scaffolding. These realities highlight why attention to teacher metalinguistic competence is not merely theoretical. it is fundamental to strengthening the entire learning ecosystem.

Arabic language teachers face linguistic responsibilities that are not always encountered in other languages. The presence of *fusha* and various *ammiyyah* dialects requires teachers to consciously navigate between formal and informal registers (Harbi, 2022). The language's rich root and pattern morphology means that even a single verb form can carry multiple layers of meaning depending on its derivation. Syntax, too, can be demanding, with structures that shift between classical and modern usage. In such an environment, limited metalinguistic competence can hinder not only instructional clarity but also students' confidence in learning (Abdalla, 2024). Teachers who lack this deeper level of linguistic

awareness may struggle to diagnose errors, misinterpret learners' difficulties, or rely heavily on rote explanations that do not foster long-term understanding. Conversely, teachers who are metalinguistically informed tend to be more adaptive, reflective, and sensitive to the underlying linguistic processes that shape student learning. Sulaikho (2022), writing in *al-Lahjah*, highlights how teachers with deeper grammatical awareness are more capable of differentiating fusha-based structures from colloquial interference, a challenge commonly reported in Indonesian Arabic classrooms.

Given the centrality of this competence, researchers have long tried to understand the various factors that might influence it. Sociolinguistic variables especially age, gender, and educational background have been discussed extensively in the wider field of linguistic performance and cognitive processing (Kroll et al., 2021). Age, for instance, has been associated with accumulated experience, cognitive maturity, and long-term exposure to linguistic variation. Older teachers often bring a nuanced understanding of language use shaped by years of classroom engagement, professional development, and lived experience. Gender, although frequently studied, has produced mixed and sometimes contradictory findings. While a number of studies suggest that men and women may differ in certain aspects of language processing or communication styles, other empirical evidence shows no meaningful differences in linguistic competence or pedagogical performance. The inconsistent results raise important questions about whether gender truly influences metalinguistic competence or whether such differences are context dependent.

Educational background, meanwhile, emerges as a particularly compelling variable in the case of Arabic language teaching. Teachers may come from universities, Islamic boarding schools, or private language courses, each representing distinct educational traditions. Universities typically emphasize theoretical depth, academic Arabic, and formal linguistic analysis. Islamic boarding schools, on the other hand, offer intensive exposure to classical texts, traditional grammar, and daily immersion in Arabic religious discourse. Private language courses generally focus on practical communication skills, applied grammar, and modern pedagogical methods. *Al-Lahjah* studies, such as those by Hanif & Rifa'i (2020), illustrate how differences in institutional culture significantly shape teachers' linguistic reasoning and error-analysis strategies. These varied trajectories can shape how teachers conceptualize language, approach classroom instruction, and understand the underlying mechanics of Arabic. As Khamrayeva (2024) notes, institutional differences in curriculum, teaching orientation, and exposure to linguistic theory can contribute to meaningful variation in teachers' linguistic competencies. Supporting this, Sulaikho (2023) found that institutional pathways influence not only linguistic mastery but also teachers' interpretive judgment in evaluating student errors an insight highly relevant to the Indonesian Arabic teaching context.

While sociolinguistic factors have been widely studied within general language education, a notable gap exists in research focusing specifically on Arabic language teachers in Indonesia. Much of the existing literature has paid greater attention to learner outcomes, teaching strategies, or language acquisition processes, leaving the competence of teachers themselves relatively underexplored. This is surprising given that teacher knowledge is central to shaping student achievement and instructional quality (Ummah & Albshkar, 2025). The lack of empirical understanding becomes even more pronounced when considering the unique nature of Arabic education in Indonesia. Unlike contexts where Arabic is used as a national or daily language, Indonesian learners encounter Arabic as a foreign or second religious language. Teachers are therefore the primary linguistic models, making their metalinguistic competence even more critical.

Jombang District provides an especially valuable setting to investigate this issue. The region is widely known for its strong network of Islamic educational institutions, ranging from formal madrasahs and universities to small and large Islamic boarding schools. Many teachers in this district have diverse educational backgrounds, reflecting the richness of Indonesia's Arabic learning ecosystem. Some have completed formal degrees in Arabic education or linguistics others have spent years in Islamic boarding school environments engaging intensely with classical texts; and some have attended specialized language courses that emphasize communicative proficiency. This diversity makes Jombang an ideal context for examining how different educational backgrounds shape teachers' strengths and weaknesses in key domains of metalinguistic competence, such as *istima'* or listening, *tarakib* or grammar, and *giro'ah* or reading (Maghfurin et al., 2023; Nida & Nurfitri, 2025). Comparable work in *al-Lahjah* by Zulfikar & Maulida (2021) also underscores how contextual immersion whether institutional, cultural, or linguistic can influence teachers' analytical and reflective language abilities. Exploring this relationship

not only fills a critical research gap but also offers practical benefits for teacher training and policy development.

The novelty of the present study lies in its combined focus on sociolinguistic variables, domain-specific linguistic competence, and the Indonesian Arabic teaching context. Whereas previous studies have tended to examine these factors separately or have concentrated on learner-focused outcomes, this research integrates them to provide a more comprehensive view of teacher competence. The study does not attempt to challenge earlier findings, rather, it extends and clarifies them by grounding the analysis in a unique educational environment with multiple teacher pathways. In doing so, the research positions itself as both confirmatory testing what is already known and exploratory identifying new patterns that may not have been visible in other contexts (Nurbayan et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how age, gender, and educational background shape the metalinguistic competence of Arabic language teachers in Jombang District. By employing Pearson correlation, t-test, and descriptive statistical analyses, the research seeks to present an empirically based explanation of how sociolinguistic factors influence teachers' linguistic awareness and performance (Ekasanti et al., 2021; Ulum et al., 2023; Fariha et al., 2023; Anis, 2025). The findings are expected to contribute not only to theoretical discussions on metalinguistic competence but also to the development of more targeted and responsive teacher education programs. Ultimately, insights from this study may support policy efforts aimed at enhancing both linguistic and pedagogical quality across diverse educational settings in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative correlational design to analyze how age, gender, and educational background affect the metalinguistic competence of Arabic teachers in Jombang Regency. A total of 19 active teachers participated based on two inclusion criteria: teaching Arabic at the high school level and willing to participate voluntarily. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that assessed three core domains of *istima'* (listening), *tarakib* (grammar), and *qiro'ah* (reading), with all items compiled in a questionnaire adapted from the Test of Arabic as a Foreign Language (TOAFL). Data collection was conducted during school visits, where participants completed the instruments independently under the supervision of researchers. Descriptive statistics (mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation) were generated using digital statistical analysis tools to describe performance patterns. Pearson's correlation was used to analyze the relationship between age and total competency, gender differences were tested using the Independent Samples t-test, and variations among teachers' educational backgrounds (university, Islamic boarding school, and course-based training) were explored through comparative descriptive analysis. All procedures followed standard analytical guidelines, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study examined the metalinguistic competence of 19 in-service Arabic language teachers in Jombang District by analyzing three key sociolinguistic variables age, gender, and educational background and their statistical relationships with teachers' performance across three competency domains: *istima'* (listening), *tarakib* (grammar), and *qiro'ah* (reading). The results are presented narratively to provide a clear and coherent understanding of the empirical patterns emerging from the dataset.

a. Age and Metalinguistic Competence

The participants ranged in age from 23 to 56 years, offering a naturally varied distribution for assessing whether metalinguistic competence differs across stages of professional maturity. Table 1 displays the individual ages and total metalinguistic scores of the 19 teachers. The descriptive already suggests some variations, with older teachers particularly those in their late forties and fifties tending to obtain higher overall scores than those in their early to mid twenties.

To statistically verify the direction and strength of this association, a Pearson product moment correlation was conducted. The correlation coefficient obtained was $r = 0.4979$, which, based on the criteria outlined by Sugiyono (2013), falls within the moderate range (0.40–0.59). This result indicates a moderately positive linear relationship between age and metalinguistic competence. In other words, within the observed sample, increases in age were associated with increases in

metalinguistic performance, though not at a level that would be considered strong or highly predictive.

Table. 1 Age and Metalinguistic Competence Scores

Respondents	Age	Metalinguistic Score
1	26	443,2
2	23	438,266667
3	29	458
4	26	441,966667
5	27	444,433333
6	35	437
7	32	442
8	35	461,7
9	36	459,233333
10	36	465,4
11	33	418,533333
12	35	418,533333
13	37	459,233333
14	40	449,366667
15	50	456,766667
16	56	471,566667
17	30	434,566667
18	32	446,9
19	28	439,5

	Age	Metalinguistic Score
Age	1	
Metalinguistic Score	0,5	1

Coefficient Interval	Level of Relationship
0,00 - 0,199	Very Low
0,20 - 0,399	Low
0,40 - 0,599	Moderate
0,60 - 0,799	Strong
0,80 - 1,00	Very Strong
Reference : Sugiyono(2013)	

From a descriptive perspective, the distribution of scores reflected this pattern. The two oldest participants aged 50 and 56 achieved total scores of 456.77 and 471.57, respectively, placing them among the highest-scoring individuals in the dataset. Meanwhile, several younger participants aged 23 to 29 scored in the 438–444 range, indicating moderate levels of competence that did not reach the highest tier represented in the sample. Nonetheless, it is important to note that variation existed within each age group: some teachers in their thirties scored relatively lower than expected, while some in their late twenties performed higher than their peers. Such variation suggests that while age shows a general upward pattern, the individual data points retain enough variability to avoid oversimplified conclusions.

Overall, the age-related results present a coherent statistical picture. The moderately positive correlation demonstrates a measurable association without implying determinism, and the descriptive distribution supports a general upward trend in competence across increasing age ranges. These outcomes provide a robust quantitative foundation for further conceptual interpretation in later sections of the study.

b. Gender and Metalinguistic Competence

The sample consisted of 12 male and 7 female teachers. Table 2 summarizes the metalinguistic scores of both groups. To evaluate whether there were statistically meaningful differences between genders, a Two-Sample t-Test assuming equal variances was conducted.

Table 2. Gender and Metalinguistic Competence

Gender	Gender Code	Metalinguistic Score
Perempuan	2	443,2
Perempuan	2	438,2667
Perempuan	2	458
Perempuan	2	441,9667
Laki-Laki	1	444,4333
Laki-Laki	1	437
Laki-Laki	1	442
Laki-Laki	1	461,7
Laki-Laki	1	459,2333
Laki-Laki	1	465,4
Perempuan	2	418,5333
Laki-Laki	1	418,5333
Laki-Laki	1	459,2333
Perempuan	2	449,3667
Laki-Laki	1	456,7667
Laki-Laki	1	471,5667
Laki-Laki	1	434,5667
Perempuan	2	446,9
Laki-Laki	1	439,5

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	1	2
Mean	449,1611116	442,3190477
Variance	240,842599	149,9380982
Observations	12	7
Pooled Variance	208,7586575	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	0,995698193	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0,16667959	
t Critical one-tail	1,739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0,33335918	
t Critical two-tail	2,109815578	

The results indicated $t(17) = 0.996$ and p (two-tailed) = 0.333.. With the p-value far above the 0.05 significance threshold, the analysis showed no statistically significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of their metalinguistic competence. Numerically, the mean score for males was 449.16, while females averaged 442.32. Although this numerical difference is visible at a descriptive level, it does not represent a statistically meaningful divergence when variance and sample sizes are taken into account.

The variance values were 240.84 for males and 149.94 for females, suggesting a slightly wider distribution of performance among male teachers. However, because the pooled variance remained stable and the t-value did not approach the critical thresholds (± 2.109), the inference remains consistent: gender did not function as a differentiating factor in metalinguistic performance within this sample.

Descriptively, both groups shared overlapping score ranges. For example, two female participants achieved scores of 458.00 and 449.37, which were comparable to several male participants who scored within the 456–471 range. Conversely, both groups also had individuals with scores in the 418–440 range. This overlap further reinforces the statistical finding that gender was not a discriminating variable in the dataset.

In sum, gender-related results show a pattern of equivalence rather than divergence. The statistical test confirms that metalinguistic competence was distributed in a broadly similar manner across male and female teachers in the study.

c. Educational Background and Metalinguistic Competence

Teachers' educational backgrounds were categorized into three groups: university, course-based training, and Islamic boarding school. Metalinguistic competence was measured across three domains: *istima'* (listening), *tarakib* (grammar), and *qiro'ah* (reading). The results are shown in Table 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3. Istima' and educational background

ISTIMA'			
University	Course	Islamic boarding school	
36,92	38,4	35,07	
36,55	36,18	38,03	
36,92	37,66	38,03	
	35,81	36,55	
	37,66	36,18	
	37,29	36,18	
	36,55	38,03	
		35,44	
		36,55	
36,79666667	37,41333333	37,04333333	MEAN
0,2136196	1,130368671	1,708956797	STANDAR DEVIASI

As shown in Table 3, the mean *istimā'* scores were University (36.79), Course based (37.41) and Islamic boarding school (37.04). The highest mean was recorded among teachers with a course-based background, though the difference between the course based and Islamic boarding school groups was minimal (0.37 points). Standard deviations were 0.21, 1.13, and 1.70, respectively, indicating generally tight clustering of scores, particularly among university-trained teachers. The narrow spread of scores across all three groups suggests that listening-related metalinguistic skills were relatively homogeneous across educational backgrounds, with no extreme high or low outliers.

Table 4, Tarakib and educational background

TARAKIB			
University	Course	Islamic boarding school	
55,05	53,2	56,16	
59,12	56,16	55,05	
57,27	59,49	60,23	
	53,57	61,71	
	58,01	53,2	
	59,12	60,6	
	55,42	61,34	
		56,16	
		58,38	
57,14666667	56,28333333	57,14667	MEAN
2,037801102	3,146813203	2,727312	STANDAR DEVIASI

Grammar competence displayed a more noticeable pattern. Table 4 shows University (57.14), Course based (56.28) and Islamic boarding school (57.14). University and Islamic boarding school teachers achieved identical mean scores (to two decimal places). Course-based teachers scored slightly lower (by approximately 0.86 points), though not substantially. Standard deviations ranged from 2.03 to 3.14, indicating slightly higher performance dispersion than in listening. These results point to a convergence between university and Islamic boarding school backgrounds in grammar-focused competence, which may reflect similarities in structural linguistic emphasis in both educational settings.

Table 5. Qiro'ah and educational background

QIRO'AH			
University	Course	Islamic boarding shool	
39,51	41,36	39,88	
41,73	40,25	39,51	
39,14	40,62	40,25	
	36,18	41,36	
	39,14	36,18	
	40,62	40,99	
	39,88	42,1	
		38,77	
		39,14	
40,1266667	40,7433333	39,88	MEAN
1,40079739	0,56518434	0,37	STANDAR DEVIASI

The results for reading competence, shown in Table 5, were University (40.12), Course based (40.74) and Islamic boarding school (39.88). The course-based group achieved the highest mean score, though again the differences were modest. Standard deviations were notably low (0.37–1.40), indicating highly consistent performance within each group, especially in the Islamic boarding school cohort. The close proximity of the group means suggests that reading-related metalinguistic skills were well distributed, with no educational background demonstrating obvious superiority.

The quantitative results of this study reveal a clear pattern that helps illuminate how demographic and educational factors intersect with the metalinguistic competence of Arabic language teachers in Jombang. The data show that age maintains a moderate positive relationship with metalinguistic competence, a pattern evident not only in the correlation analysis but also in the descriptive trends across participants. Older teachers consistently demonstrated higher levels of linguistic awareness, suggesting that accumulated teaching experience contributes meaningfully to the development of metalinguistic insight.

In contrast, gender did not emerge as a significant factor. Statistical testing confirmed that male and female teachers achieved comparable levels of metalinguistic competence, indicating that gender does not shape linguistic awareness in this professional context. Both groups performed similarly across all measured domains, reinforcing the conclusion that metalinguistic development is not determined by gendered differences in opportunity or engagement.

The analysis of educational background paints a more nuanced picture. While teachers from university, course-based, and Islamic boarding school pathways exhibited subtle differences across specific skill domains such as listening, grammar, and reading the overall variation across groups remained relatively small. Low standard deviations suggest that the three educational tracks produce broadly comparable levels of competence, with individual differences likely shaped more by personal experience and pedagogical engagement than by institutional training alone.

Taken together, these findings depict a dataset marked by moderate correlation strengths, non-significant group differences, and tightly clustered score distributions. This statistical profile provides a stable empirical foundation for the interpretive arguments developed in the discussion section, enabling a coherent linkage between the quantitative evidence and the broader theoretical implications of the study.

Discussion

The patterns that emerged from this study regarding age, gender, and educational background in relation to metalinguistic competence among Arabic language teachers in Jombang reveal not only a confirmation of established theories but also several nuances that invite deeper reflection on what shapes teachers' linguistic awareness. Rather than presenting the statistical results in isolation, these findings make more sense when interpreted through the lenses of teacher cognition, sociocultural learning, and metalinguistic development.

The moderate positive correlation between age and metalinguistic competence ($r = 0.4979$) underscores an intuitive but theoretically important idea: metalinguistic awareness appears to mature as teachers accumulate professional experiences. This relationship should not be misread as evidence of a simple linear progression in which older teachers are automatically more competent. Instead, it is more plausible that years of confronting student misunderstandings, evaluating classroom discourse, and engaging in informal pedagogical reflection gradually deepen teachers' sensitivity to linguistic structures. This interpretation resonates strongly with Borg's (2006) framework of teacher cognition, which suggests that teachers' interpretive capacities are continually reshaped through experience, reflection, and context-specific challenges.

Recent empirical work lends further support to this view. Shalihah, Feroji, and Nuroh (2025), for instance, found that Arabic teachers with substantial teaching experience benefited more markedly from reflective curriculum training, particularly because they had accumulated a broad repertoire of linguistic encounters to draw upon. Their findings mirror the trajectory implied in the present study: metalinguistic competence tends to grow not simply with years spent teaching, but with the quality of reflective engagement embedded within those years.

The gender-related findings offer a different but equally meaningful insight. The absence of a significant gender difference ($p = .333$) suggests that male and female teachers in the Jombang context operate within relatively comparable professional ecologies. Both groups seem to have equitable access to training, collaborative dialogue, and reflective opportunities conditions that appear far more influential than gender itself in shaping metalinguistic competence. This interpretation aligns with Ilmiani, Marsiah, and Nuryaman (2023), who found that reflective teaching practices foster professional growth across genders, reinforcing the notion that metalinguistic competence is tied more to engagement with reflective processes than to demographic factors.

Educational background reveals a more differentiated pattern. Teachers trained in short-term courses recorded the highest means in listening comprehension (*istima'*), whereas university and Islamic boarding school trained teachers performed similarly in grammar (*tarakib*). Reading (*qiro'ah*) scores also displayed a subtle institutional gradient, with course-trained and university graduates clustering closely together, and Islamic boarding school graduates showing only a slight lag. These distributions suggest that different training environments cultivate distinct metalinguistic strengths: course-based programs appear to emphasize communicative and auditory skills, whereas universities and Islamic boarding school focus more on grammatical analysis and textual interpretation.

This interpretation aligns with recent language pedagogy research. Glumova, Sukhareva, and Malysheva (2022) emphasize that explicit instruction in grammatical structure significantly enhances learners' analytical reasoning about language. Although their study tested students rather than teachers, the underlying principle applies here: structured exposure to linguistic form whether in academic courses or Islamic boarding school study tends to sharpen analytical awareness. Meanwhile, the more practice oriented focus in short term programs may explain their participants' stronger performance in listening related tasks.

Interestingly, the low standard deviations across all groups suggest that institutional background alone does not fully explain variations in metalinguistic competence. Rather, individual-level factors such as personal initiative, linguistic curiosity, informal learning habits, or participation in peer discussion groups may exert stronger influences. Sociocultural theory provides a compelling framework here: Vygotsky (1978) conceptualizes higher cognitive functions as emerging through socially mediated interactions. In this sense, teachers' metalinguistic awareness develops not only through formal

instruction, but also through the cumulative effects of mentoring relationships, collaborative problem-solving, and authentic classroom engagement.

Taken together, these findings point toward a more dynamic understanding of teacher metalinguistic competence one in which age (as a proxy for accumulated experience), reflective practice, and institutional training intersect rather than operate independently. A plausible model emerging from this study suggests the following: institutional background provides foundational scaffolds; experience creates opportunities for interpreting linguistic events; and reflective practice mediates these experiences into deeper awareness. This contributes a nuanced extension to existing teacher cognition theories by highlighting the central role of socially and experientially mediated reflection.

The implications for practice and policy are noteworthy. Teacher training programs might benefit from embedding more structured reflective components peer observation cycles, collaborative analysis of student errors, or discussion-based workshops where teachers articulate their linguistic reasoning. Since gender does not appear to be a determining factor, such initiatives can be broadly inclusive without requiring gender-specific content. At the same time, the domain-based differences point to the value of differentiated training: strengthening listening linked metalinguistic skills for university and Islamic boarding school graduates, and offering grammar-focused enrichment for teachers emerging from short-term training pathways.

Policy-level decisions may also need reorienting. Instead of investing heavily in initial certification alone, sustained and community-based professional development through learning circles, mentoring networks, and reflective communities of practice may yield more durable improvements in teacher metalinguistic competence. Because age and experience correlate positively with competence, veteran teachers could be strategically positioned as mentors who help transfer reflective habits and linguistic insights to newer educators.

Theoretically, the study contributes to a growing body of metalinguistic literature by proposing that age can be reconceptualized as an indicator of cumulative reflective exposure rather than merely a demographic variable. The integration of insights from teacher cognition, Vygotskian sociocultural theory, and metacognitive models helps situate metalinguistic competence as a socially scaffolded and experience-mediated construct. This reframing opens pathways for future research, such as longitudinal designs that trace teachers' metalinguistic growth over time or intervention studies that evaluate the effects of structured reflective practice.

Of course, the study's limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size ($n = 19$) restricts generalizability, and the descriptive nature of educational-background comparisons prevents causal conclusions. Additional variables such as teachers' actual Arabic proficiency, access to professional networks, or the intensity of informal learning were not measured but may meaningfully influence competence.

Future studies could expand the sample across districts, adopt mixed-method designs to capture qualitative nuances alongside quantitative patterns, and test the impact of reflective interventions experimentally. Such work could substantiate or refine the developmental model proposed here.

In essence, this discussion interprets the statistical findings through theoretically grounded lenses, integrates evidence from recent reputable studies, and articulates both conceptual and practical implications. The patterns observed across age, gender, and educational background paint a picture of metalinguistic competence as an evolving, socially mediated, and institutionally framed capacity. By situating the findings within broader scholarly conversations, this study contributes meaningful insights to ongoing debates about how Arabic teachers develop the metalinguistic awareness essential for effective instruction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that metalinguistic competence among Arabic teachers in Jombang grows not from demographic differences, but from the depth of their professional experiences and the reflective habits they build over time. Age emerges as a meaningful indicator not because older teachers inherently possess stronger abilities, but because years of navigating classroom discourse gradually sharpen their sensitivity to linguistic form and function. Gender, by contrast, proves irrelevant, reinforcing that equitable access to pedagogical exposure matters more than biological categories. Variations across educational backgrounds suggest that each training pathway cultivates distinct strengths course based programs enhance listening-oriented awareness, while universities and Islamic boarding schools foster more robust grammatical and textual reasoning. Yet the relatively small gap between

groups highlights a deeper truth raised in the discussion that personal engagement, reflective practice, and sustained interaction with authentic linguistic tasks exert a stronger influence than institutional labels alone.

Together, these results affirm the study's core argument: metalinguistic competence is an evolving, socially mediated capacity shaped by experience and reflective cognition rather than static personal traits. This insight points toward a practical direction for policy. Instead of investing solely in preservice credentials, educational systems should prioritize ongoing reflective development mentoring, peer dialogue, collaborative error analysis, and structured professional reflection to strengthen teachers' metalinguistic awareness throughout their careers.

While the limited sample size constrains generalizability, the patterns uncovered here offer a clear conceptual contribution: they illuminate how Arabic teachers build the metalinguistic insight necessary for effective instruction, and they clarify where future training efforts should be focused to sustain that growth.

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