

Nation's Framework for Arabic Vocabulary Instruction: A Grade VIII Case Study in West Sumatera

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ABSTRACT

Arabic vocabulary is often taught through translation and memorization, yet teachers report that students forget new words and struggle to use them. This qualitative case study analyzed the vocabulary learning process in a Grade VIII Arabic class at a private Islamic junior secondary school (madrasah tsanawiyah) in Rambatan, West Sumatera, using Paul Nation's framework as a deductive analytical lens. Data were collected through classroom observation, a semi-structured teacher interview, documentation of the teacher's book and school facilities, and a vocabulary recall test administered to 18 students to provide supplementary descriptive evidence of their short-term recall of the lesson content. The test was intended to examine students' immediate recall of previously taught vocabulary rather than to measure long-term retention or statistically evaluate instructional effectiveness. The observed learning process was analyzed against eight elements derived from Nation's three principles: vocabulary planning, the learning conditions of noticing, retrieval, and elaboration, and the four strands. One element was consistent with the framework, two were partly consistent, and five were absent. Words were introduced through the teacher's read-aloud and direct translation, no retrieval or elaboration activities were observed, and only language-focused learning was evident. The recall test showed that only two of the 18 students reached the school's passing score on the assessed material. Four interrelated constraints were identified, alongside underused resources, including a classroom projector and a teacher's book recommending audio and picture media. The study's contribution is diagnostic and design-oriented: it identifies aspects of classroom vocabulary instruction that diverge from Nation's framework and proposes an untested, resource-sensitive four-step cycle of noticing, retrieval, elaboration, and fluency practice for future piloting.

Keywords: Arabic Vocabulary; Learning Conditions; Learning Design; Mufradat; Paul Nation

ABSTRAK

Mufradat bahasa Arab di madrasah sering diajarkan melalui terjemahan dan hafalan, sementara guru melaporkan bahwa siswa mudah melupakan kosakata baru dan kesulitan menggunakannya. Studi kasus kualitatif ini menganalisis proses pembelajaran mufradat di kelas VIII sebuah madrasah tsanawiyah swasta di Rambatan, Sumatera Barat, dengan menggunakan kerangka Paul Nation sebagai landasan analisis deduktif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru, dokumentasi buku guru dan sarana sekolah, serta tes ingatan kosakata terhadap 18 siswa sebagai data deskriptif pendukung untuk mengetahui kemampuan mengingat kosakata dalam jangka pendek setelah pembelajaran. Tes tersebut bertujuan mengidentifikasi sejauh mana siswa masih mengingat materi kosakata yang telah dipelajari, bukan untuk mengukur retensi jangka panjang atau menguji efektivitas pembelajaran secara statistik. Proses pembelajaran yang teramati dianalisis berdasarkan delapan unsur yang diturunkan dari tiga prinsip Nation, yaitu perencanaan kosakata, kondisi belajar berupa noticing, retrieval, dan elaboration, serta empat untai pembelajaran. Satu unsur sesuai dengan kerangka, dua unsur sesuai sebagian, dan lima unsur tidak ditemukan. Kosakata diperkenalkan melalui pembacaan oleh guru dan terjemahan langsung, tanpa kegiatan retrieval maupun elaboration, sedangkan hanya untai pembelajaran yang berfokus pada bahasa yang tampak. Hasil tes ingatan menunjukkan bahwa hanya dua dari 18 siswa mencapai nilai ketuntasan sekolah pada materi yang diujikan. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi empat kendala yang saling berkaitan serta sarana yang belum dimanfaatkan secara optimal, termasuk proyektor kelas dan buku guru yang merekomendasikan penggunaan media audio dan

gambar. Kontribusi penelitian ini bersifat diagnostik dan berorientasi pada perancangan pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menunjukkan aspek-aspek proses pembelajaran mufradat yang belum sesuai dengan kerangka Nation dan mengusulkan rancangan siklus empat langkah, yaitu noticing, retrieval, elaboration, dan latihan kefasihan, yang disesuaikan dengan ketersediaan sarana sekolah dan masih perlu diuji dalam penelitian lanjutan.

Kata-kata Kunci: Kosakata Bahasa Arab, Kondisi Belajar; Desain Pembelajaran: Mufradat; Paul Nation

INTRODUCTION

Arabic vocabulary (*mufradāt*) is the foundation of all Arabic language skills. Students with a limited vocabulary struggle both to understand what they read and hear and to express ideas in speech and writing (Mahyudin & Alihsan, 2023; Yanti et al., 2026). A recurring problem has been reported in several madrasahs: students memorize words but forget them and find them difficult to use. Norhalisah et al. (Norhalisah et al., 2026) reported that vocabulary learning in a madrasah tsanawiyah was hindered by the limited use of media and little review at home, while Yanti et al. (Yanti et al., 2026) found that madrasah aliyah students forgot words because the words were rarely used in sentences or exercises. Methods are also often implemented differently from their concept. Afifah (Afifah, 2025) found that the direct method in an Islamic primary school was delivered in Indonesian without realia, pictures, or gestures, although the method is meant to confront learners directly with the target language (Qudrotulloh et al., 2021).

Many studies have responded to these problems by offering new methods or media. Audio-visual media, animated videos, and song videos have been reported to improve vocabulary mastery (Dwita, 2023; Fadillah et al., 2025; Mustamin et al., 2022; Wahdi & Fakhrin, 2022), as have digital games, picture cards, and teacher-made videos (Majid & Hamdun, 2024; Nizar et al., 2025; Salma et al., 2026; Umroh et al., 2024). Table 1 compares the studies closest to the present one in terms of purpose, design, and what was examined.

The studies closest to the present one can be grouped by what they examined. Descriptive studies identified students' problems in mastering vocabulary in a madrasah tsanawiyah, such as limited media use, classroom conditions, and little review at home (Norhalisah et al., 2026), and described teachers' strategies, media use, vocabulary load, and motivation in a madrasah aliyah (Yanti et al., 2026). However, they did not map these problems onto vocabulary-learning conditions or analyze the observed lesson sequence against a vocabulary-learning framework. A needs analysis for Arabic materials examined what students need or prefer (Sukmawati et al., 2025), not how vocabulary was actually taught in class. Development and experimental studies focused on products and scores: Arabic vocabulary flashcards were evaluated through expert validity and practicality (Salma et al., 2026), and an interactive medium (ActiveInspire) was compared with conventional teaching through vocabulary scores in Grade IX (Kamaluddin et al., 2026). These studies did not examine the classroom process into which the product was introduced or which learning activities produced the difference, and none measured long-term retention.

Studies that do use Nation's four strands in Arabic teaching have applied the framework forward, to plan a vocabulary module based on a teacher survey in Malaysia (Razman et al., 2022) and to teach a university Fusha course (Alamsyah et al., 2026). In short, the closest studies either identify problems and strategies descriptively, measure the outcome or validity of a medium, or use the four strands to plan new programs. None of them takes an existing madrasah lesson and analyzes its sequence against vocabulary-learning conditions and strands. As a result, recommendations from this body of work tend to remain general, such as "teachers need to use varied media", without showing which learning steps are missing. A similar pattern appears in the development of animated Arabic vocabulary videos for early childhood, which were evaluated by expert validity (89.33%) and teacher-rated practicality (90%) rather than by the classroom learning process (Nurlaila et al., 2025)."

At the same time, Arabic language learning increasingly intersects with digital technology. The literature review by Nurlaila et al. (2026) explains that Arabic teaching materials can be adapted into digital books, videos, audio, and games, and that new technology is beneficial only when it suits the material, student characteristics, teacher competence, time, and available facilities. A recent scoping review also found that few studies of digital assessment in Arabic learning target specific language skills (Chambali et al., 2026). These reviews are conceptual and do not show at which step of vocabulary learning technology should be placed. This article addresses that question at the level of design: technology is treated as meaningful when it creates learning conditions that are missing in the classroom, not as an end in itself.

This article adopts Paul Nation's framework for three reasons. First, the framework covers the three layers needed to analyze vocabulary learning as a whole: what is taught, how words are learned, and how activities are balanced. In his work on materials development, Nation (2003) proposes three general principles. The first is vocabulary planning, which prioritizes high- and mid-frequency words and controls how many are introduced. The second is creating learning conditions, of which there are three: noticing, retrieval, and elaboration. The third is balancing activities across four strands: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development (I. S. P. Nation, 2022). Throughout this article, *principle*, *condition*, and *strand* are used only in these senses. Conditions describe what happens in learners' minds when a word is learned, whereas strands describe the types of activity that make up a program; a single activity can therefore create a condition and belong to a strand at the same time. Second, each element can be translated into indicators that are observable in class, such as the presence or absence of recall or sentence-making activities, and the principles rest on vocabulary acquisition research showing, for example, that words encountered more often are more likely to be learned (Peters & Webb, 2018). Third, the framework is not tied to one language and has already been used in Arabic teaching, to plan a vocabulary module in Malaysia (Razman et al., 2022) and to teach Fusha Arabic in higher education (Alamsyah et al., 2026). It is also consistent with the steps of vocabulary teaching widely known in Indonesia, namely listening, pronouncing, understanding meaning, reading, writing, and making sentences, with translation as the last resort (Effendy, 2005).

The framework is used in two distinct ways in this article. In the Method and Results, it serves as a deductive analytical framework for examining what happened in the classroom. In the final part of the Discussion, it serves as a design framework for proposing what could be done differently. The two uses are kept separate so that observed findings are not confused with design suggestions. The study is set at the madrasah tsanawiyah level, where most students build their basic Arabic vocabulary and where teachers generally work with prescribed textbooks and limited facilities. The contribution is diagnostic and design-oriented rather than a new theory: the study applies an established framework to locate specific gaps in one classroom process and derives a resource-sensitive, untested design from those gaps. The study addresses three questions, each answered in a separate part of the Results and Discussion: 1) how the vocabulary learning process takes place in the classroom and to what extent it is consistent with Nation's framework, 2) what constraints and opportunities are present at the school, and 3) what conceptual learning design can be derived from this diagnosis, Nation's framework, and previous studies.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a single case study design, because it sought to understand the learning process as it took place in one classroom rather than to measure the effect of a treatment (Creswell, 2014). The case was Arabic vocabulary learning in the Grade VIII Islamic junior secondary school, Rambatan, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatera in the 2025/2026 academic year. Researcher acted as a non-participant observer and did not teach during data collection.

Four data sources were used. First, observation on Arabic lesson in Grade VIII with the session lasting 40 minutes. The observation guide examined vocabulary presentation, the explanation of meaning and pronunciation, the use of instructional media, and students' responses. Field notes were recorded during the lesson and, if applicable, supplemented immediately afterward. Second, a semi-structured interview with the Arabic teacher. The interview covered the objectives and steps of vocabulary teaching, available and used media, and perceived problems. The teacher was selected as the study participant because he was responsible for teaching Arabic in Grade VIII. This class was chosen because it provided a relevant context for examining the implementation of Arabic vocabulary instruction at the junior secondary level. Third, documentation involved examining the Arabic textbook for teachers published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the learning facilities available at the school. Fourth, a short-term vocabulary recall test was administered to the 18 students to examine their immediate recall of the vocabulary taught during the lesson. The test was intended as a supplementary source of descriptive data rather than as a quantitative assessment of learning outcomes. It consisted of 20 items, including matching Arabic words with pictures and translating words, covering the topic of daily activities. The test was prepared by the researcher, with each item worth 5 points and a total score ranging from 0 to 100. This test was used to support the analysis of students' short-term recall of the lesson content, rather than to measure long-term retention or test the effectiveness of the instructional approach statistically.

The data were analyzed following the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). In the condensation stage, field notes, the interview record, and documents

were analyzed deductively using Nation's three principles, broken down into eight elements: one planning element, three learning conditions, and four strands (Table 1). The indicators were formulated from Nation's description of the activities that create each element and aligned with the steps of vocabulary teaching widely used in Indonesia (Effendy, 2005). The analysis was carried out by the first author, and the classifications were discussed with the co-authors in peer debriefing

For vocabulary planning, only teacher-side decisions were considered, namely how words were selected, ordered, and divided for teaching; students' achievement of the textbook's target was treated as outcome evidence and was not used to rate planning. Each element was assigned one of three categories. *Consistent* was assigned when the indicator was observed or documented and its form matched Nation's description. *Partly consistent* was assigned when the indicator was present but only in a reduced form, for example when noticing occurred through a single route or when the number of words was bounded by the textbook but not selected or ordered by frequency. *Absent* was assigned when the indicator was found in none of the data sources.

The three sources were compared for each element. When they agreed, the element was classified directly. When they disagreed, observation was given priority for what happened in class, and documentation for what was planned or prescribed; the discrepancy itself was recorded as a finding. For example, the teacher's book prescribes consolidation exercises after each word list, but no such exercise was observed and the teacher did not mention one, so retrieval was classified as absent and the gap between the prescribed and observed practice was reported as a constraint. Findings not covered by the framework, such as constraints and opportunities at the school, were identified inductively.

Tabel 1. Analytical Framework Based on Paul Nation's Principles

Principle	Element	Indicator sought in the classroom
Vocabulary planning	Selection, sequencing, and load	Basis for selecting and ordering words (e.g., frequency); how the lesson's word list is divided and paced
Creating learning conditions	Noticing	How new words are introduced: sound, pictures, context, or translation
	Retrieval	Activities requiring students to recall a word's form or meaning without seeing it (e.g., picture-cued recall, review)
	Elaboration	Activities using words in sentences or new situations
Balancing the four strands	Meaning-focused input	Words are met in texts or conversations that students understand for their message
	Meaning-focused output	Students use words to convey messages orally or in writing
	Language-focused learning	Deliberate explanation of word form and meaning
	Fluency development	Practice using familiar words faster and more fluently

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Observed Vocabulary Learning Process

Arabic at this school is taught as one integrated subject, and vocabulary is always the first material of each lesson, before the dialogue texts, structures, and reading. The teacher stated that the objectives of vocabulary teaching are for students to recognize new words, pronounce them well and fluently, and understand their meanings for spoken and written communication. The observed sequence was much shorter than these objectives, as summarized in Figure 1.

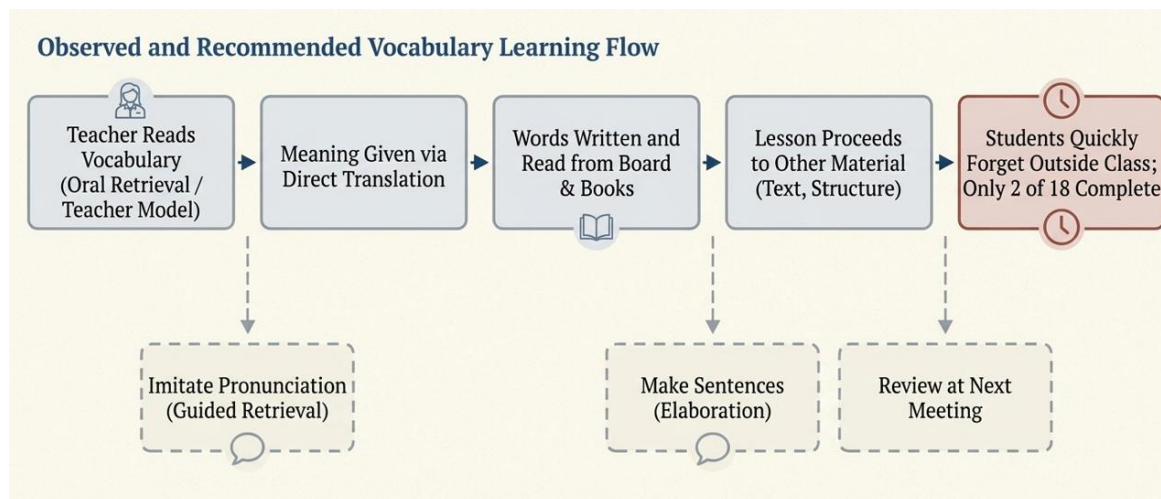


Figure 1. Observed Vocabulary Learning Sequence in the Grade VIII Arabic Lesson

Source: authors' elaboration from observation and interview data.

In the observed lesson, the teacher read the words aloud with the teacher's own pronunciation, gave their meanings through direct Indonesian translation, and the words were written and read from the board and the textbook. The lesson then moved on to other content, such as texts and language structures. No activity was observed in which students imitated the words, recalled them without seeing their meaning, used them in new sentences, or reviewed words from earlier lessons. In the interview, the teacher reported that students know the words only while in class and forget them after leaving. This report is the teacher's perception; it was not tested with a delayed measure. As supporting descriptive evidence, only 2 of the 18 students reached the passing score of 75 on the vocabulary test. The figure therefore contrasts the observed sequence with the steps recommended for vocabulary learning, of which retrieval and elaboration were missing.

Consistency of the Process with Nation's Principles

The observed sequence in Figure 1 was then analyzed against the framework in Table 1, using the decision rules described in the Method. Table 2 gives examples of how evidence from the data sources led to the classification of individual elements. For each element, the analysis considered not only whether an activity was present but also how it was implemented. Table 3 presents the result.

Table 2. Examples of the Audit Trail from Evidence to Classification

Evidence	Element and category	Interpretation
The teacher read the words aloud and gave their Indonesian equivalents; no pictures, context, or gestures were used	Noticing: partly consistent	Noticing occurred, but through a single cue to meaning
The teacher reported difficulty in pronouncing some words	Noticing: supports partly consistent	The spoken form of words was not modeled reliably
The teacher's book prescribes consolidation exercises after each word list; no imitation, recall, or review activity was observed or mentioned	Retrieval: absent	Prescribed practice was not carried out; discrepancy reported as a constraint

Evidence	Element and category	Interpretation
The lesson's word list follows the textbook (20–25 words per lesson) and was introduced at the start of the lesson; no frequency-based ordering or segmentation was evident	Vocabulary planning: partly consistent	The number of words is limited by the textbook, but selection and sequencing are not frequency-based
The teacher reported that students know the words only in class; 2 of 18 students reached the passing score	Outcome evidence (not classified as an element)	Used descriptively; retention was not measured

Source: authors' analysis

Table 3. Consistency of the Vocabulary Learning Process with Nation's Framework

No	Element	What happened in class	Consistency
1	Vocabulary planning	Words follow the prescribed textbook list of 20–25 words per lesson; no frequency-based selection, ordering, or segmentation was evident	Partly consistent
2	Noticing	Words are introduced through the teacher's reading and translation, without pictures or context	Partly consistent
3	Retrieval	No activities requiring students to recall words without seeing them (e.g., picture-cued recall, review)	Absent
4	Elaboration	No activities using words in sentences or new situations	Absent
5	Meaning-focused input	Words are not met again in texts or conversations for understanding messages	Absent
6	Meaning-focused output	Students do not use the words to convey messages	Absent
7	Language-focused learning	Deliberate explanation of word meanings through translation	Consistent
8	Fluency development	No practice using familiar words more fluently	Absent

Of the eight elements, one was consistent, two were partly consistent, and five were absent. In terms of the three principles, vocabulary planning was partly consistent; among the three learning conditions, only noticing was present, and only in a reduced form; and among the four strands, only language-focused learning was evident. In short, the observed process remained at the noticing stage and did not progress to retrieval and elaboration.

Constraints and Opportunities at the School

The inductive analysis identified four interrelated constraints. The first concerns how meaning was conveyed: the teacher explained each word only by translating it into Indonesian, without pictures, context, or gestures, and reported difficulty in pronouncing some words. The second concerns vocabulary load: the teacher's book sets 20–25 words and expressions per lesson, the list was introduced at the start of the lesson without division or frequency-based ordering, and the teacher reported that students did not memorize the target number. The third concerns the variety of activities: the teacher acknowledged not using varied methods and strategies and perceived that students found vocabulary learning difficult and boring, and classroom activity was limited to explaining meanings. The fourth concerns students' attention: students often paid little attention while the teacher explained the lesson. Table 4 maps each constraint onto the part of Nation's framework it affects; the impacts listed are interpretations, not measured effects.

Table 4. Constraints in Vocabulary Learning and Their Place in Nation's Framework

No	Constraint	Part of Nation's framework affected	Possible impact (interpretation)
1	Meaning conveyed only through direct translation; limited pronunciation model	Noticing	Each word may be linked to a single cue to meaning and an unreliable spoken form
2	20–25-word list introduced without division or frequency-based ordering	Vocabulary planning	Many words may be met only once, limiting repeated encounters

No	Constraint	Part of Nation's framework affected	Possible impact (interpretation)
3	Little variety of activities; only explanation of meanings	Retrieval and elaboration; meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and fluency development	Students have few opportunities to recall and use words
4	Low student attention during explanation	Noticing, and therefore the conditions that build on it	Weak attention may limit noticing from the start

Discussion

Why Mastery Remained Low: A Process That Stops at Noticing

According to Nation (2003), noticing a word is only the beginning. A word becomes established in memory when learners repeatedly retrieve it without seeing its meaning, and it becomes usable when they meet or use it in contexts different from the one in which it was first met. The classroom studied provided neither opportunity. Compared with the six steps of Effendy (2005), the observed lesson included listening, understanding meaning, reading, and writing, but not pronouncing practice or making sentences, the steps closest to retrieval and elaboration. The teacher's perception that students forget quickly can therefore be interpreted not as a weakness of the students but as a plausible consequence of a process that stops at noticing. The low pass rate on the test is consistent with this interpretation, but the study did not measure retention and cannot establish a causal link.

This interpretation confirms and qualifies earlier studies. It confirms Yanti et al. (2026) and Norhalisah et al. (2026), who linked forgetting to words being rarely used and reviewed, and adds a more specific location for the problem: the missing conditions are retrieval and elaboration. It also qualifies how successful media studies are read. Rachma and Niswah (2023) reported a sequence in which students listened, imitated, and then guessed words from pictures; Sustiana and Zaki (2024) described showing pictures, guessing, imitating, and memorizing; and Umroh et al. (2024) included exercises after word presentation in their videos. Seen through Nation's framework, the guessing and exercise activities in these studies are the parts that create retrieval opportunities, which suggests that their reported benefits may depend more on these activities than on the media themselves. Because these studies differ in level, design, and outcome measures, this is a reading of their procedures rather than evidence about the present classroom.

A recent study at the same level points in a similar direction. Kamaluddin et al. (2026) compared a class using the ActiveInspire interactive medium with a conventionally taught class among 20 Grade IX students at a state madrasah tsanawiyah and reported a significant difference in vocabulary mastery ($t\text{-count } 3.27 > t\text{-table } 2.10$). The authors attributed the result to visual and audio displays and interactive exercises. In Nation's terms, interactive exercises provide opportunities for retrieval, which were absent in the class studied here. However, that study did not specify which activities produced the difference, its sample was small and the treatment brief, and long-term retention was not measured. The finding is therefore used as an indication, not as evidence that a particular medium would solve the problems found in the present classroom.

Vocabulary Planning: Selection, Sequencing, and Load

In the observed lesson, vocabulary planning followed the textbook list. The teacher's book bounds the load at 20–25 words per lesson, but no consideration of frequency was evident in selecting or ordering the words, and the list was introduced without division. According to Nation (2003), planning is the first step: high- and mid-frequency words make up most of the words learners encounter, so they should be prioritized and introduced in manageable numbers. The issue in this class is therefore not simply that there are too many words, but that there is no arrangement to make the number manageable. When 20–25 words are introduced at once without review, many words are likely to be met only once, whereas words encountered more often are more likely to be learned (Peters & Webb, 2018). The teacher's book anticipates this by prescribing consolidation exercises, but these were not observed. The gap thus lies less in the curriculum documents than in their implementation in the classroom.

A practical response is to divide the word list into small segments and to give priority to the words that occur most often in the lesson texts. The integrated lesson makes this feasible, because the dialogue and reading texts of the same lesson can be used both to count how often each word occurs and as places where the words are met again. Umroh et al. (2024) took a similar approach by grouping words by theme and including exercises in each video segment.

Interpreting the Constraints

The four constraints in Table 4 appear to share a pattern: the whole process relies on the teacher's explanation. The first constraint weakens noticing. Translation is not wrong in itself, since teachers may need the mother tongue when students' backgrounds vary (Qudrotulloh et al., 2021) and the appropriate method depends on students' proficiency (Rappe et al., 2021). The problem is that translation was the only route. Effendy (2005) places translation as the last resort after context, pictures, synonyms, antonyms, real objects, and gestures, and Sofia and Azzahra show that combining the (2026) direct method with teaching aids reduces reliance on translation. When the teacher also has difficulty pronouncing some words, students lack a reliable model of the spoken form; Fudhaili et al. (2023) show that Arabic pronunciation errors stem both from differences between sound systems and from teacher and facility factors.

The third constraint corresponds to the finding that only one strand was present. Nation (2022) recommends a roughly equal share of time for the four strands, whereas in this class the time was devoted to explaining meanings. Without meaning-focused input, students do not meet new words again in texts they understand; without meaning-focused output, they do not use the words to communicate; and without fluency development, familiar words do not become fluent. This pattern is consistent with the problem reported elsewhere that students recognize words but struggle to use them (Yanti et al., 2026). A study applying the four strands in Arabic teaching reported improved course scores (Alamsyah et al., 2026), and Arabic teachers in Malaysia expressed a need for a four-strands vocabulary module (Razman et al., 2022).

The fourth constraint, low student attention, calls for better classroom management, as also suggested by Norhalisah et al. (2026). Read together, the constraints may form a self-reinforcing cycle: low attention may lead the teacher to set the projector aside, the absence of pictures and sound may increase reliance on translation, and lessons limited to explanation may further reduce engagement. This is an interpretation based on limited data and requires further testing. If it holds, improving one element alone, such as switching on the projector, is unlikely to be enough; the content displayed, student activities, and classroom management would need to change together.

Implications: A Conceptual Vocabulary Learning Design

This section uses Nation's framework as a design framework. The design builds on resources documented at the school (the projector, the teacher's book, and the lesson texts) and treats tools drawn from the literature as optional. Figure 2 shows the resulting conceptual cycle, and Table 5 specifies its steps. The design is derived from the gaps identified above and has not been piloted or evaluated.

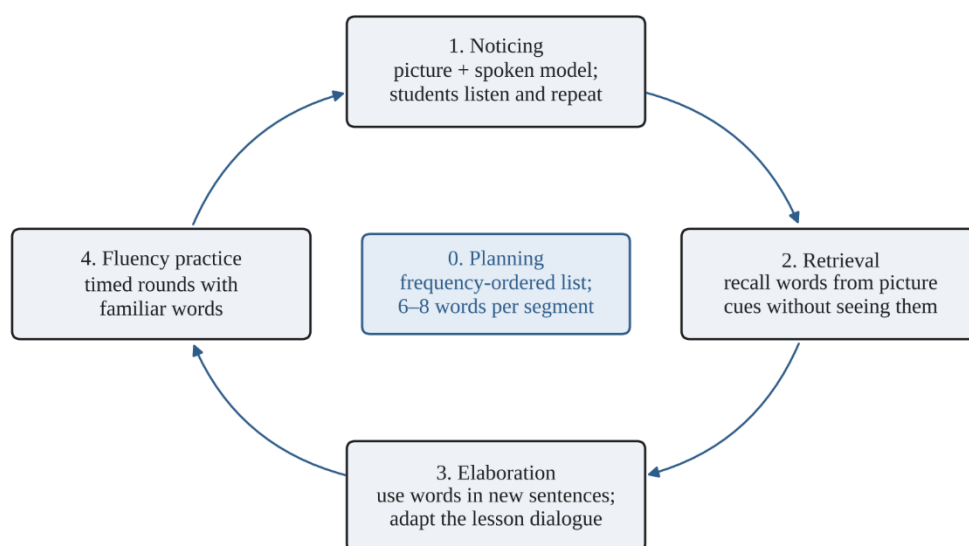


Figure 2. Conceptual Design of a Vocabulary Learning Cycle Based on Paul Nation's Framework

Source: authors' elaboration based on Paul Nation Framework and the findings of this study.

The cycle begins with planning before the lesson. The teacher counts how often each target word occurs in the lesson's dialogue and reading texts, orders the words by this count, and divides the 20–25-word list into segments of about six to eight words. Each segment then goes through four steps. Imitation is placed in the noticing step, because repeating a word that has just been heard does not require recall; the retrieval step is defined as producing or recognizing a word from a cue without seeing its form or meaning.

Table 5. Conceptual Design of the Vocabulary Learning Cycle Based on Nation's Framework

Step	Analytical link (condition → main strand)	Activity (suggested time)	Observable indicator	Resources: essential / optional
0. Planning (before the lesson)	Vocabulary planning	Count word occurrences in the lesson texts; order words by frequency; divide the list into segments of about 6–8 words	Segmented, frequency-ordered word list prepared	Teacher's book and lesson texts / –
1. Noticing	Noticing → language-focused learning	Show a picture for each word with a reliable spoken model; students listen and repeat; translate only if a picture or context cannot convey meaning (5–7 min)	Students point to the correct picture when they hear a word	Picture cards or board drawings / projector with recorded audio
2. Retrieval	Retrieval → language-focused learning	Show pictures without the written word; students say the Arabic word (productive recall); then say a word and students choose the picture (receptive recall); oral or paper quiz (5–7 min)	Students produce or recognize the word from the cue without seeing it written or translated	Picture cards, paper quiz / projector, digital quiz
3. Elaboration	Elaboration → meaning-focused input and output	Students read or listen to the lesson dialogue for meaning, then adapt a line using target words about themselves (10–15 min)	Students produce a sentence or dialogue line that uses the target word with appropriate meaning in a new context	Lesson texts / –
4. Fluency practice	Contributes to fluency development	At the start of the next lesson, students name pictures or answer quick questions with familiar words over two or three timed rounds (3–5 min)	Responses become faster across rounds while remaining mostly correct	Picture cards, timer / video replay at home

Times and indicators are proposals for piloting, not tested values. The fluency step is a brief activity within the cycle and does not by itself constitute Nation's full fluency-development strand. Source: authors' elaboration.

As an illustration, in the Grade VIII lesson on telling the time (*as-sā'ah*), the word list can be divided into a segment on times and a segment on daily activities. In the noticing step, pictures of clocks and activities are shown with the spoken form of each word, and students repeat after the model. In the retrieval step, the teacher shows a clock picture without the written word and students say the matching Arabic expression; the teacher then says an expression and students point to the matching picture. In the elaboration step, students adapt the lesson dialogue using their own daily schedules. In the fluency practice step, students answer quick questions about the time in two or three rounds at the start of the next lesson before a new segment is introduced. If the projector is unavailable, printed picture cards and board drawings can be used, and the teacher can prepare pronunciation in advance using the audio recordings that accompany the material.

The relationship between the fourth step and the fluency-development strand should be stated precisely. According to Nation (2022), fluency development is one strand of the whole program, ideally receiving its own share of time and meeting four conditions: familiar material, a focus on meaning, pressure to perform faster, and a sufficient quantity of practice. The fluency step in this cycle meets these conditions only partly and briefly, so it contributes to the strand but does not replace it. Likewise, the links between steps and strands in Table 5 are analytical relationships, not one-to-one equivalences. The cycle touches all four strands, but their full balance must be arranged at the level of the overall program.

The design draws on elements that previous studies have found useful separately, such as audio-visual media (Fadillah et al., 2025), games and quizzes (Majid & Hamdun, 2024; Nugraha et al., 2025), and videos containing exercises (Umroh et al., 2024). These studies provide a rationale for the design choices, not evidence that this cycle works. The novelty of the design lies in how the steps are derived and organized: each step responds to an element classified as absent or partly consistent in Table 3, and each uses resources documented at the school. The retrieval step does not require students' own devices, since oral or paper-

based quizzes are sufficient (Nugraha et al., 2025). The design remains a proposal until it is piloted and evaluated.

Digital tools are optional enhancements rather than essential components. The review by Nurlaila et al. (2026) suggests that downloaded videos and audio can be replayed without an internet connection, which makes short recordings with reliable pronunciation suitable for the noticing step in a school known to have a projector. Interactive quizzes and electronic worksheets could support the retrieval step, and, as Spector et al. (2016) note, technology in assessment is largely directed towards formative assessment that gives feedback during learning, which fits the low-stakes purpose of retrieval practice. However, such tools require devices and an internet connection, and students' device ownership and digital literacy were not examined in this study. Replaying recordings alone also does not meet the conditions that Nation (2022) sets for fluency development, which require activities carried out by the students.

The design also has implications for teacher preparation. The teacher recognized that vocabulary teaching needed to change but had no route other than translation. This is consistent with the strategies described by Hew and Brush (2007), namely teacher professional development, adequate access to resources, and a culture that supports innovation. In this case, the most needed preparation is not skill in using applications but practice in pronunciation and in designing retrieval and elaboration activities. Since Nurlaila et al. (2026) is a literature review that did not test the effect of technology, the suggestions in this section remain design considerations.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the vocabulary learning process in a Grade VIII Arabic class at a madrasah tsanawiyah in Rambatan through Paul Nation's framework. At the level of observed findings, words were introduced through the teacher's read-aloud and direct translation and then written and read from the board and textbook, with no observed recall, sentence-making, or review activities; only two of the 18 students reached the passing score on the material assessed. At the level of interpretation, the process remained at the noticing condition: retrieval and elaboration were absent, only language-focused learning among the four strands was evident, and vocabulary planning was only partly consistent with the framework. Four interrelated constraints were identified: meaning conveyed only through translation, an unmanaged vocabulary load, little variety of activities, and low student attention. At the level of pedagogical implications, the study proposes a conceptual four-step cycle of noticing, retrieval, elaboration, and fluency practice that relies on resources documented at the school; its effectiveness has not been tested. The contribution is diagnostic and design-oriented: it shows how Nation's framework can locate specific gaps in an existing madrasah lesson and inform a resource-sensitive design. For teacher preparation, the findings suggest that training should focus on pronunciation and on designing retrieval and elaboration activities rather than on technology alone.

The evidence base is narrow. The study is a single case drawn from one teacher, one class, and one observed lesson, so conditions at the school may have changed. Students contributed test scores but not qualitative accounts, retention was not measured, and students' device ownership and digital literacy were not examined. The findings should not be generalized beyond this case. Future research should pilot the proposed cycle, conduct a process evaluation of how teachers and students carry out each step, measure vocabulary learning with immediate and delayed tests, and apply the same analytical framework in other schools and levels.

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