

Developing Arabic language learning motivation through joyful learning: evidence from an Indonesian Islamic primary school

Dinda Oktavia^{1*}, Muhammad Solihin Pranoto¹

¹*Department of Islamic Religious Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan, Binjai, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia*

Abstract: Education plays a crucial role in improving the quality of human resources. However, the learning process in schools is often perceived as monotonous by students due to the limited variety of teaching strategies and the lack of innovation in developing learning materials and instructional media. This condition may lead to low learning motivation, particularly in Arabic language learning, which requires active student engagement throughout the learning process. This study aims to investigate whether the implementation of the joyful learning method can improve the learning motivation of sixth-grade students in the Arabic language subject. This research employed a quantitative approach using *classroom action research*, which was conducted through the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observation and documentation and analyzed descriptively to identify changes in students' learning motivation during the implementation of the actions. The findings indicate that the implementation of the joyful learning method successfully improved students' learning motivation, as demonstrated by increased participation, enthusiasm, attention, and active engagement during the learning process. Nevertheless, this study is limited because it was conducted in only one class at a single Islamic elementary school and relied primarily on qualitative data; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to a broader context. The novelty of this study lies in the implementation of the joyful learning method in Arabic language instruction at an Islamic elementary school through classroom action research, providing practical evidence that enjoyable and student-centered learning can effectively enhance students' learning motivation.

Keywords: Joyful learning, learning motivation, Arabic language learning, classroom action research.

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Introduction

Education is a strategic investment in the development of high-quality human resources. Through education, students are expected not only to acquire knowledge and skills but also to develop character, critical thinking abilities, creativity, and attitudes that support lifelong learning. This is in line with Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System of Indonesia, which states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process that enable students to actively develop their potential, including spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character,

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: *dindaoktavia1615@gmail.com

Address of corresponding author:

Dinda Oktavia; Department of Islamic Religious Education, Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan, Binjai, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.
Jl. Insinyur H. Juanda No. 5, Timbang Langkat, Kecamatan Binjai Timur, Kota Binjai, Sumatera Utara 20737, Indonesia.

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and the skills required for themselves, society, the nation, and the state. Furthermore, Article 40, Paragraph (2) of the law stipulates that educators are obliged to create a meaningful, enjoyable, creative, dynamic, and dialogical learning atmosphere. This provision emphasizes that the success of the learning process is determined not only by the content delivered but also by teachers' ability to create engaging and motivating learning experiences that encourage students' active participation.

Education plays a strategic role in optimally developing students' potential, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. In its development, the term "education" has come to mean guidance or assistance intentionally provided to students by adults to help them mature. Learning is not only about understanding material, but also about shaping students' attitudes and motivation. Motivation is an effort to enhance certain strengths to achieve specific goals. This motivation can arise from both external and internal sources and can be provided by motivators such as teachers, parents, and close relatives or friends (Indra Satia Pohan, 2024). Learning motivation is a crucial psychological aspect in the educational process. Motivation not only serves as a driving force for learning but also determines the direction and sustainability of students' learning activities (Uno, 2021). Learning motivation is a crucial factor influencing success. Students with high learning motivation tend to be more active in learning, have a sense of curiosity, and demonstrate a serious commitment to understanding the material being studied. Conversely, students with low learning motivation typically lack enthusiasm for learning and tend to be passive in class. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in the classroom, creating an atmosphere that fosters enthusiasm for learning and enhances student motivation through appropriate learning strategies (Nurfauzan, 2022).

Student learning motivation is also influenced by how teachers deliver learning materials. Teachers who are able to build good communication with students tend to more easily create a pleasant learning atmosphere. A good relationship between teacher and students can increase student confidence, allowing them to ask questions or express their opinions during the lesson. Conversely, overly stressful learning can lead to students being less active and less motivated (Krisnawati K, 2022). Furthermore, the use of appropriate learning methods and a conducive learning environment significantly impact student learning motivation. A comfortable, interactive environment can create a more effective learning atmosphere, making it easier for students to understand the material. Therefore, teachers need to create a learning atmosphere that can encourage students to actively ask questions, answer questions and interact during the learning process (Fitriyah S, 2026).

The learning process is essentially a change in individual behavior toward a more positive outcome as a result of interaction with the surrounding environment. This change does not occur spontaneously; it requires external stimuli or encouragement to support the ongoing learning process. In the context of formal education, teachers play a crucial role in providing this encouragement through motivation, guidance, and reinforcement, which can enhance students' enthusiasm for learning (Sukenti et al., 2026; Namora et al., 2026). Learning as a process also involves active interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, the use of creative and innovative approaches by teachers is a crucial factor in developing students' potential and creativity (Sukenti, Tambak & Ningsih, 2026). Teachers are required to consider and implement a variety of appropriate learning methods to prevent monotony. A variety of methods used appropriately will help create a more engaging, enjoyable, and effective learning environment, thereby encouraging active engagement and optimal development of student creativity (Azkiya, 2024).

Learning Arabic can be a significant challenge if started at a later age, as it involves a wealth of material that must be memorized thoroughly, not simply memorized temporarily. Furthermore, various fields of knowledge are closely interconnected, requiring commitment, perseverance, and patience throughout the learning process. Although success ultimately comes from Allah SWT, it also depends on our own efforts and perseverance. Therefore, before beginning, we should always pray to Allah SWT for ease in learning Arabic. By understanding this Arabic learning method, it is hoped that teachers and parents will have a clearer understanding of the starting point and how to teach and learn Arabic to students (Solihin Pranoto M, 2021). In learning Arabic, student motivation is one of the factors that determines their success in understanding the material.

Arabic is often considered a difficult subject by some students because it has characteristics that differ from everyday language. These difficulties usually relate to mastery of vocabulary (mufradat), grammatical structure (qawaid), and Arabic reading and writing skills. Therefore, teachers need to use interesting and innovative learning methods so that students are more motivated in participating in Arabic language learning (Wahyudi, 2026).

Learning Arabic requires an approach tailored to the characteristics of the students. Students tend to prefer learning activities involving games, songs, learning media, and group discussions over monotonous lessons. Therefore, teachers are required to develop engaging learning methods to reduce student stress while learning Arabic. The use of interactive learning methods has been shown to increase student motivation and engagement in the learning process (Diana D, 2022). Initial observations conducted at MIS Fard Ahillah also revealed similar conditions. The arabic learning process was predominantly teacher-centered, with learning activities relying mainly on lectures and note-taking. Classroom interaction was relatively limited, and many students showed low enthusiasm, passive participation, and reduced confidence when responding to teachers questions. Some students even appeared distracted and less interested during Arabic lessons. These classroom conditions indicate that students learning motivation remains relatively low and requires immediate instructional improvement.

Although previous studies consistently indicate the effectiveness of joyful learning, several research gaps remain. First, most previous studies focused primarily on general elementary subjects or islamic religious education rather than arabic language learning. second, many studies evaluated learning outcomes or classroom engagement without specifically investigating the improvement of learning motivation as primary research focus. Third, only limited studies have implemented joyful learning through classroom action research (CAR) in islamic elementary schools, particularly by employing systematic cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection to improve arabic learning motivation. Consequently. Empirical evidence regarding how joyful learning can gradually improve students learning motivation with in authentic arabic classroom settings remains limited.

This study attempts to address these reserch gaps by implementing the joyful learnin method thourgh classroom action research in arabic language instruction at MIS Fard Ahillah. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the implementatin of the joyful learning method in arabic language learning and to examine its effectiveness in improving the learning motivatin of sixth-grade students at MIS Fard Ahillah, . It is expected that the findings will contribute both theoretically to the develoment of intructional strategies in arabic language education and practically by providing teachers with an effective and enjoyable learning approach that can enchance students motivation in classroom learning.

Literature review

Joyful Learning

One learning approach that can be used to increase student motivation is the joyful learning method. Joyful learning comes from the English words "joyful," meaning "pleasant," and "learning," meaning "learning." Joyful learning is a learning process that does not apply psychological or physical pressure; it creates a pleasant, creative, and joyful atmosphere. Joyful learning does not necessarily mean encouraging students to laugh and have fun (Abdul Karim, 2023). Joyful learning is a student-centered approach to learning, creating an active, creative, effective, and enjoyable learning environment. This method can be implemented through educational games, icebreakers, group discussions, learning songs, and other interactive activities that build students' enthusiasm for learning. Joyful learning can help students reduce fear and anxiety during the learning process, making it easier for them to absorb the material presented by the teacher (Cholid, 2021).

Joyful learning is a teaching and learning process that enables students to experience enjoyment in the learning scenario or process. Joyful learning is structured in such a way as to create a cheerful and engaging learning atmosphere. This atmosphere will keep students focused on classroom activities, resulting in a focused learning experience that will impact learning outcomes. Therefore, the joyful learning model is highly appropriate because it involves active student participation, prevents boredom, and maintains student focus. The advantages of the

joyful learning model include making the learning process more enjoyable and relaxed, enabling a variety of strategies to be implemented, enabling students to be active and creative, and providing greater variety in delivering learning materials (Salamah U, 2021).

Joyful learning is an approach to the learning process designed to create a fun and relaxed learning atmosphere. This approach emphasizes engaging and interactive learning experiences, where students are actively involved through both educational and recreational activities. In practice, learning can be packaged in the form of playful learning activities, both in and outside the classroom, creating a more lively and meaningful learning environment for students (Islamiyah, 2023). The joyful learning method not only focuses on creating a pleasant learning atmosphere but also emphasizes students' emotional involvement in learning. An enthusiastic, yet relaxed learning environment can help students more easily absorb information provided by the teacher. Enjoyable learning can stimulate students' curiosity, leading them to be more active in exploring the learning material. This situation indicates that emotional factors have a significant influence on the success of the learning process (Maghfirah D, 2024).

Implementing the joyful learning method is believed to increase student motivation because it involves positive emotions, a sense of enjoyment, and meaningful learning experiences. To implement the joyful learning method, teachers need to pay attention to students' needs and interests. Engaging learning media such as icebreakers, learning songs, educational games, and group discussions can enrich students' learning experiences and make the learning process more meaningful (Barry Mahmudi M, 2025). The joyful learning method can also enhance interaction between teachers and students, as well as between students, creating a conducive and collaborative learning environment. Furthermore, the joyful learning method in Arabic language instruction can also help boost students' confidence in using Arabic. Students who learn in a fun atmosphere tend to be more active in asking and answering questions, and engaging in conversations with their peers using Arabic. The use of engaging learning media can increase learning motivation and communication skills in Arabic language learning (Khayati A, 2023).

Learning motivation in Arabic language learning

Learning motivation is widely recognised as one of the most influential determinants of successful Arabic language acquisition because it shapes learners' willingness to invest effort, persist in overcoming linguistic challenges, and actively participate in classroom activities. Unlike first-language acquisition, learning Arabic as a foreign or second language requires sustained motivational support due to the complexity of its phonological system, grammatical structures, morphological patterns, and extensive vocabulary, which frequently create cognitive and emotional barriers for learners. Recent studies indicate that students with strong intrinsic motivation demonstrate greater persistence in mastering Arabic language skills, participate more actively in communicative learning activities, and achieve higher academic performance than learners whose motivation relies primarily on external reinforcement (Alrashidi & Phan, 2023; Al-Qahtani & Alghamdi, 2024). From the perspective of *Self-Determination Theory*, learning motivation develops when instructional environments satisfy learners' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby encouraging students to engage voluntarily and meaningfully in language learning activities (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Similarly, research in second language education has shown that emotionally supportive classrooms, positive teacher–student relationships, and meaningful communicative interaction significantly enhance learners' intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement with foreign language learning (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Papi et al., 2023). Consequently, learning motivation should be understood not merely as a psychological prerequisite for Arabic language learning but as a dynamic construct that is continuously shaped by instructional practices, classroom climate, and learners' educational experiences.

Contemporary research further suggests that instructional innovation plays a decisive role in strengthening students' motivation to learn Arabic because traditional teacher-centred approaches often limit learner interaction and reduce opportunities for meaningful language use. Student-centred pedagogies that incorporate collaborative learning, educational games, digital technologies, storytelling, and authentic communication tasks have consistently been associated with higher levels of behavioural engagement, enjoyment, and confidence in Arabic language

classrooms (Alharbi, 2023; Alzahrani et al., 2024). These instructional approaches encourage learners to construct knowledge actively through social interaction and experiential learning rather than through passive memorisation of grammatical rules and vocabulary lists. Recent evidence also demonstrates that learners' motivation increases substantially when teachers create emotionally safe classrooms in which making mistakes is viewed as a natural component of language development rather than as an indicator of failure (Resnik & Dewaele, 2023; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2023). Furthermore, integrating enjoyable learning experiences with authentic communicative practice enhances learners' willingness to communicate in Arabic while simultaneously reducing foreign language anxiety, one of the principal obstacles to successful language acquisition (Papi et al., 2023). These findings collectively indicate that motivational enhancement in Arabic language learning depends not only on instructional content but also on teachers' capacity to design engaging, interactive, and psychologically supportive learning environments.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to learner motivation, several important research gaps remain within Arabic language education. Most recent studies have examined motivation in university or secondary school contexts, whereas empirical evidence from Islamic primary schools remains relatively limited, particularly regarding the implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches that systematically cultivate motivation among young learners. Moreover, previous investigations have frequently measured learning motivation as an outcome variable without adequately explaining the pedagogical mechanisms through which instructional strategies stimulate students' intrinsic motivation, engagement, and persistence in Arabic language learning (Alharbi, 2023; Al-Qahtani & Alghamdi, 2024). There is also a shortage of classroom-based intervention studies employing iterative and reflective research designs to investigate how teachers can progressively strengthen students' motivation through continuous pedagogical improvement. Addressing these gaps is particularly important because early motivational experiences strongly influence learners' subsequent attitudes toward Arabic language learning and their long-term academic development. Therefore, further research should investigate evidence-based instructional approaches that integrate positive emotional experiences, active participation, collaborative learning, and reflective teaching practices to establish a more comprehensive theoretical and practical understanding of motivational development in Arabic language education.

Method

Research design

This study employed a *classroom action research* (CAR) design to improve students' learning motivation through the implementation of the joyful learning method in Arabic language instruction. Classroom action research is particularly appropriate for addressing authentic classroom problems because it enables teachers to systematically implement, evaluate, and refine instructional practices through iterative cycles of action and reflection (Burns, 2021; Mertler, 2022). In language education, CAR has increasingly been recognized as an effective approach for enhancing teaching quality while simultaneously promoting learner engagement and reflective pedagogical practice (Banegas et al., 2023). The study adopted the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral model, consisting of four recursive stages: *planning, action, observation, and reflection*. This model emphasizes continuous improvement through collaborative reflection, allowing instructional interventions to be progressively refined until the desired educational outcomes are achieved (Kemmis et al., 2022). Two action cycles were conducted in the present study (Cycle I and Cycle II), with the implementation of the second cycle informed by the evaluation and reflection derived from the first cycle. The iterative nature of the design enabled the researchers to identify instructional weaknesses, modify learning activities, and optimize the implementation of the Joyful Learning approach to improve students' learning motivation.

Research participants and setting

The study was conducted at *MIS Fard Ahillah*, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants consisted of 27 sixth-grade students, comprising 13 male and 14 female students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as this technique is widely

recommended in qualitative educational research when participants are intentionally selected because they possess characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The selection was based on preliminary classroom observations indicating that students demonstrated relatively low motivation in Arabic language learning. This condition was reflected in limited classroom participation, low enthusiasm, passive engagement during instructional activities, and minimal interaction with both teachers and peers. These characteristics made the classroom an appropriate context for investigating the effectiveness of Joyful Learning in enhancing students' motivation.

Classroom action research procedures

The research was conducted through three sequential stages: *pre-cycle*, *Cycle I*, and *Cycle II*. The *pre-cycle* served as a diagnostic stage aimed at identifying students' initial learning motivation and classroom learning conditions before the intervention. Initial observations revealed that Arabic language instruction remained predominantly teacher-centred, resulting in limited student participation and reduced enthusiasm during classroom learning. Based on these findings, *Cycle I* was designed by integrating the Joyful Learning method into Arabic language instruction. Learning activities incorporated various student-centred and interactive strategies, including educational games, ice-breaking activities, Arabic vocabulary songs, collaborative group discussions, role-playing, and contextual learning tasks. These activities were intended to create an enjoyable, emotionally supportive, and participatory learning environment, which previous studies have identified as essential for fostering students' intrinsic motivation and active engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2023). Following the implementation of *Cycle I*, systematic observations and reflective discussions were conducted to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses. The results informed modifications introduced in *Cycle II*, including improved classroom management, greater student participation, more varied collaborative activities, and enhanced teacher facilitation. The action research process continued until the predetermined indicators of learning motivation were achieved.

Data collection techniques

Data were collected using *classroom observation* and *documentation*, allowing for methodological triangulation and increased trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2024). *Classroom observation*. Observation constituted the primary data collection technique for examining students' learning motivation throughout the implementation of Joyful Learning. An observation protocol was developed to systematically record students' behavioural engagement during classroom instruction. The observed indicators included; students' attention during learning activities; active participation in classroom interactions; enthusiasm and emotional engagement; collaborative involvement in group activities; willingness to respond to teachers' questions and complete learning tasks. Teacher instructional practices during the implementation of *joyful learning* were also observed to examine instructional consistency and pedagogical effectiveness. *Documentation*. Documentation served as complementary evidence supporting the observational findings. Documentary data included classroom photographs, lesson plans, instructional materials, field notes, students' learning activities, and reflective journals produced throughout the implementation of both action cycles. These documents provided contextual information that enriched the interpretation of observational data and enhanced the credibility of the research findings.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using the *interactive qualitative data analysis model* proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which remains one of the most widely applied analytical frameworks in qualitative educational research. The analysis consisted of three interconnected processes: *data reduction*, involving data coding, categorisation, and selection of information relevant to students' learning motivation; *data display*, whereby observational findings were systematically organised into descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation; and *conclusion drawing and verification*, involving continuous interpretation of emerging themes and validation through comparison across observation cycles.

and documentary evidence. This iterative analytical process enabled the researchers to identify patterns of behavioural change and evaluate the effectiveness of the Joyful Learning intervention in enhancing students' motivation throughout the action research cycles.

Results

This study used classroom action research (CAR), aimed at improving student learning motivation by implementing the joyful learning method in Arabic language lessons in sixth grade at Mis Fard Ahillah Islamic Boarding School. This research was conducted in two cycles: planning, action, observing the results of the actions, and reflection. However, before conducting the classroom action research, the researcher first conducted a pre-cycle or initial observation to assess the initial state of student learning motivation in Arabic language lessons in sixth grade at Mis Fard Ahillah Islamic Boarding School.

Pre-cycle

The pre-cycle activity is the initial step to assess the initial state of student learning motivation in Arabic language lessons in sixth grade at Mis Fard Ahillah Islamic Boarding School. Based on the results of initial observations, the Arabic language learning process in sixth grade at Mis Fard Ahillah Islamic Boarding School is still dominated by lectures and explanations by the teacher. The teacher primarily explains the material, while students simply listen and take notes. This situation creates a less interactive learning environment, resulting in some students appearing less enthusiastic in the lesson. The interaction between the teacher and students is one-way, with students primarily listening without actively responding. Some students are also unfocused and less active when the teacher asks questions. Several students were seen chatting with their deskmates or even showing boredom during Arabic lessons. This indicates that students' motivation in Arabic is still relatively low.

Motivation to learn is a crucial factor that can influence success in the learning process. Students with high motivation tend to be more active, enthusiastic, and have a strong desire to understand the material being taught. Conversely, students with low motivation are usually less interested in learning and tend to be passive during the lesson. Motivation plays a crucial role in increasing student activity and engagement in the learning process. Lack of interaction and a monotonous or lack of learning approach can reduce student motivation. Therefore, the need for engaging, active, and pressure-free learning methods is necessary. This approach is believed to increase student engagement and motivation.

Given these conditions, teachers need to implement more engaging learning methods to encourage students to be more active and motivated in Arabic lessons. One method that can be used is the joyful learning method. The joyful learning method emphasizes creating a pleasant learning atmosphere, making students more comfortable and stress-free. A pleasant atmosphere makes it easier for students to understand the material and become more motivated to participate in Arabic lessons.

Cycle first actions

In the first cycle, researchers began implementing the joyful learning method in Arabic. This method emphasizes a fun learning process and directly involves students in the learning process. Teachers use engaging learning activities, beginning with icebreakers and guessing games. These activities aim to encourage students to be more enthusiastic and active in the learning process. Next, teachers introduce songs about Arabic vocabulary, engage in interactive Q&A sessions, and engage in group discussions. Furthermore, teachers must use a wider variety of learning media to engage students' attention.



Figure 1. Playing icebreaking

Observations in cycle I showed an increase in student learning motivation compared to the pre-cycle stage. Students began to demonstrate motivation in learning, although some students still lacked motivation. The classroom atmosphere became more active and interactive, especially when learning activities began with icebreakers, guessing games, and singing Arabic vocabulary songs. Students were more enthusiastic about participating in the lesson and were more willing to answer questions posed by the teacher. This demonstrates that the implementation of the joyful learning method can create a more enjoyable learning environment, thereby increasing student motivation in Arabic language lessons in grade VI Mis Fard Ahillah.

Enjoyable learning can increase student engagement in learning activities, thus fostering higher learning motivation (Yakub Iskandar M, 2025). Furthermore, the use of creative and interactive learning methods can also help students understand the material more easily and increase their interest in learning (Nurhayati, 2020). Arabic language learning must be tailored to student characteristics to be more effective in increasing student interest and motivation (Solihin Pranoto M M. S., 2023). Although improvements were observed in Cycle I, the results still fell short of the success targets set in this study. Several students remained less active in the Q&A activities, group discussions, and games provided by the teacher. Given that the results from Cycle I have not fully improved, a reflection phase will be conducted to implement the actions for Cycle II.

Cycle second actions

After the researcher conducted the reflection phase on the results of Cycle I, the actions in Cycle II were continued. In Cycle II, the teacher further optimized the implementation of the joyful learning method by adding a variety of more engaging learning activities. The teacher used learning media such as Arabic vocabulary cards made of cardboard, group games, and simple presentation activities such as Arabic conversations with peers that directly involved students. Furthermore, the teacher provided rewards or prizes to students who were active in the learning activities to increase their enthusiasm for learning.



Picture 3. Conversation Using Arabic

In Cycle II showed a more significant increase in student learning motivation compared to Cycle I. Students appeared enthusiastic and active in participating in learning activities. They were more confident in expressing opinions, answering questions, and actively participating in group discussions. The learning atmosphere became more lively and enjoyable, making students feel more comfortable and enjoy learning Arabic. The increase in student learning motivation in Cycle II indicates that the implementation of the joyful learning method can have a positive impact on the classroom learning process. This method not only makes learning interesting but also encourages students to be more active and participate in learning activities. Furthermore, the use of interactive media has been shown to increase student motivation and understanding. The application of interactive methods can improve students' cognitive abilities (Nabilah, 2025).

Thus, the results of this study indicate that the implementation of the joyful learning method in increasing student learning motivation in Arabic in sixth grade at Mis Fard Ahillah was able to gradually increase student motivation, starting from the pre-cycle stage, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Therefore, there was no need for Cycle III actions. Learning that is carried out in a fun, interactive way and actively involves students has been proven to create a more conducive learning atmosphere and increase student enthusiasm in the learning process.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Joyful Learning method substantially enhanced sixth-grade students' motivation to learn Arabic, as evidenced by progressive improvements in classroom participation, enthusiasm, attentiveness, confidence, and collaborative engagement throughout the two classroom action research cycles. These findings indicate that learning motivation is not merely an individual psychological characteristic but is dynamically shaped by the instructional environment, the quality of teacher–student interaction, and the emotional climate established during classroom learning. The transformation from a predominantly teacher-centred instructional approach during the pre-cycle phase to a highly interactive and enjoyable learning environment in Cycles I and II created meaningful opportunities for students to participate actively in the learning process, thereby fostering stronger intrinsic motivation and behavioural engagement. This finding supports *Self-Determination Theory*, which argues that students are more intrinsically motivated when instructional environments satisfy their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Sukenti & Tambak, 2025). Within the present study, educational games, Arabic vocabulary songs, collaborative discussions, and role-playing activities not only diversified instructional delivery but also strengthened students' perceptions of competence through successful task completion, enhanced relatedness through cooperative learning, and promoted autonomy by encouraging active participation in classroom interactions. Similar conclusions have been reported by recent studies indicating that emotionally supportive and student-centred instructional environments significantly improve learners' motivation,

engagement, and persistence across different educational contexts (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2023; Tambak & Sukenti, 2026; Wang et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022).

Another important finding emerging from this study is that the gradual improvement observed across the two action research cycles illustrates that learning motivation develops as a continuous pedagogical process rather than as an immediate outcome of a single instructional intervention. During the first cycle, students began demonstrating greater enthusiasm and willingness to participate, although some learners remained hesitant to communicate and collaborate actively during Arabic language learning activities (Sukenti et al., 2026). Reflection conducted after Cycle I enabled the teacher to redesign instructional strategies by incorporating richer interactive activities, vocabulary cards, conversation practice, and positive reinforcement through rewards, which substantially increased students' engagement during Cycle II. This iterative improvement confirms the central principle of Classroom Action Research, namely that systematic reflection enables teachers to continuously refine instructional practices in response to students' learning needs and classroom realities (Mertler, 2022; Kemmis et al., 2022; Tambak et al., 2026). From the perspective of contemporary instructional design, these findings also resonate with constructivist learning theory, which argues that meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through authentic interaction, collaboration, and contextual learning experiences rather than through passive reception of information (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021; Sukenti & Tambak, 2020). Consequently, the success of Joyful Learning observed in this study should not be interpreted solely as the effectiveness of enjoyable classroom activities but rather as evidence that reflective pedagogical adaptation progressively transforms the classroom into an environment that supports active knowledge construction and sustained motivational development.

The present findings also contribute to the growing international literature concerning motivational development in foreign language education by providing empirical evidence from the relatively underexplored context of Arabic language learning in Indonesian Islamic primary schools. While previous studies have consistently demonstrated that interactive instructional approaches enhance learner engagement, most investigations have concentrated on English language learning or general classroom settings, leaving Arabic language pedagogy comparatively underrepresented within international educational research. The present study therefore extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that *joyful learning* effectively addresses several instructional challenges commonly associated with Arabic language education, including students' anxiety toward unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical complexity, limited confidence in oral communication, and low classroom participation. These improvements can be interpreted through the lens of positive psychology in education, which argues that positive emotional experiences broaden learners' cognitive resources, stimulate curiosity, strengthen resilience, and facilitate deeper engagement with challenging learning tasks (MacIntyre et al., 2021; Dewaele et al., 2022; Sukenti & Tambak, 2023). When students experienced enjoyment through games, music, collaborative dialogue, and contextual communication activities, negative emotions associated with Arabic language learning gradually diminished, allowing learners to interact more confidently with instructional content and peers. Therefore, the findings suggest that Joyful Learning functions not merely as an entertaining instructional strategy but as an evidence-based pedagogical approach capable of fostering emotional well-being, reducing foreign language anxiety, and strengthening intrinsic learning motivation within Islamic primary education.

The effectiveness of the Joyful Learning method observed in this study can also be interpreted through the perspective of *student engagement theory*, which conceptualises engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions that collectively determine learning success. Throughout the two action research cycles, students demonstrated gradual improvements not only in behavioural participation but also in emotional enthusiasm, collaborative interaction, and confidence when communicating in Arabic, indicating that Joyful Learning simultaneously activated multiple dimensions of engagement rather than merely increasing classroom participation. This multidimensional improvement is consistent with recent educational research demonstrating that meaningful engagement develops when instructional activities stimulate curiosity, encourage peer interaction, and provide authentic opportunities for students to experience success during

learning tasks (Fredricks et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Putra et al., 2026). The educational games, vocabulary songs, role-playing activities, and collaborative discussions implemented in this study enabled students to transform from passive recipients of information into active participants who constructed knowledge through interaction, exploration, and communication. Such findings reinforce previous evidence that emotionally engaging instructional strategies reduce boredom and cognitive disengagement while increasing students' willingness to invest sustained effort in challenging academic activities, particularly within foreign language classrooms where communication anxiety frequently inhibits participation (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Resnik & Dewaele, 2023; Nurhayati et al., 2026). Consequently, the present findings suggest that Joyful Learning should be viewed as a comprehensive pedagogical framework capable of simultaneously strengthening behavioural engagement, emotional well-being, and meaningful participation in Arabic language learning rather than as a collection of entertaining classroom activities.

The findings further demonstrate that the success of Joyful Learning was closely associated with the teacher's capacity to redesign instructional practices according to students' developmental characteristics and classroom needs, highlighting the central role of teacher agency in motivating young language learners. The reflective modifications implemented between Cycle I and Cycle II—including greater instructional variation, increased collaborative interaction, contextual communication tasks, and positive reinforcement—illustrate how teachers' adaptive pedagogical decision-making directly influences students' motivational development. Contemporary educational research consistently argues that effective teachers do not simply implement predetermined instructional models but continuously refine classroom practices based on evidence generated through observation, reflection, and student feedback, thereby creating learning environments that remain responsive to learners' cognitive and emotional needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; König et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2026). In Arabic language education, where students frequently perceive linguistic structures and vocabulary acquisition as cognitively demanding, teachers' ability to transform instruction into enjoyable and psychologically safe learning experiences becomes particularly important for sustaining learners' persistence and reducing language anxiety. The present findings therefore reinforce current arguments that instructional innovation should prioritise pedagogical flexibility, reflective teaching, and learner-centred classroom interaction rather than relying exclusively on curriculum content or textbook-oriented instruction (Muhajir et al., 2025; Yasin et al., 2025). From this perspective, the effectiveness of *joyful learning* arises not solely from the method itself but from teachers' professional competence in facilitating emotionally supportive, socially interactive, and cognitively stimulating learning experiences.

The present study also makes several important theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on Arabic language education. Theoretically, it extends existing motivational research by demonstrating that Joyful Learning can be understood through the integrated perspectives of *Self-Determination Theory*, constructivist learning theory, positive psychology, and student engagement theory, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of how enjoyable instructional environments promote sustained learning motivation among young learners. Unlike many previous investigations that primarily evaluated immediate learning outcomes or academic achievement, the present study highlights the gradual development of students' intrinsic motivation through repeated cycles of pedagogical improvement, suggesting that motivation should be conceptualised as a dynamic educational process rather than a static psychological characteristic (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024; Muallimin et al., 2026). Practically, the findings provide valuable implications for Arabic language teachers by demonstrating that relatively simple instructional innovations—including games, music, collaborative learning, role-playing, contextual dialogue, and formative positive reinforcement—can substantially improve students' willingness to participate actively in classroom learning without requiring sophisticated technological resources (Abdullah et al., 2025). These findings are particularly relevant for Islamic primary schools in developing countries, where instructional innovation often depends more heavily on teachers' pedagogical creativity than on advanced educational infrastructure. Accordingly, educational policymakers and teacher education institutions should consider integrating Joyful Learning principles into pre-service and in-service professional development

programmes to strengthen teachers' competence in designing motivating, student-centred, and emotionally supportive Arabic language classrooms.

Despite these significant contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research was conducted within a single Islamic primary school involving only twenty-seven sixth-grade students, limiting the transferability of the findings to broader educational contexts with different institutional characteristics, learner populations, or curricular environments (Tambak, Ahmad, & Sukenti, 2020; Purwaningsih et al., 2026). Second, the classroom action research design prioritised continuous instructional improvement rather than experimental comparison; therefore, although the findings demonstrate consistent motivational enhancement across two instructional cycles, causal relationships between joyful learning and learning motivation should be interpreted with appropriate methodological caution (Amalia et al., 2026). Third, the study relied primarily on classroom observations and documentary evidence, which provide rich contextual understanding but do not capture students' motivational changes through validated psychometric instruments or longitudinal measurement (Baihaqi et al., 2026; Chapakiya et al., 2025). Future research should therefore employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs involving multiple schools, larger participant samples, and advanced statistical analyses to examine the long-term influence of Joyful Learning on motivation, language achievement, self-efficacy, and communicative competence. Future investigations may also explore potential mediating variables—including foreign language enjoyment, classroom emotional climate, teacher enthusiasm, learner autonomy, and psychological need satisfaction—to develop a more comprehensive explanatory model of motivational development in Arabic language education (Miratunisa et al., 2026). Such investigations would not only strengthen the empirical foundation of Joyful Learning but also contribute to the development of more sophisticated theoretical models explaining how enjoyable, student-centred instructional environments foster sustainable motivation and meaningful learning across diverse educational settings.

Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that the implementation of the *joyful learning* approach can substantially enhance elementary students' motivation to learn Arabic by fostering a more engaging, interactive, and emotionally supportive classroom environment. The iterative findings generated through two cycles of Classroom Action Research demonstrate that improvements in learning motivation are not immediate outcomes of instructional change but emerge progressively through continuous pedagogical reflection, adaptation, and refinement. The observed increases in students' participation, enthusiasm, attentiveness, confidence, and collaborative engagement indicate that enjoyable learning experiences stimulate learners' intrinsic motivation by creating instructional conditions that encourage active involvement and meaningful interaction throughout the learning process. These findings extend the growing body of literature on motivational pedagogy by demonstrating that Joyful Learning should be understood not merely as an entertaining instructional strategy but as a learner-centred pedagogical framework that integrates positive emotional experiences, collaborative learning, and active participation to support sustainable motivational development in Arabic language education. From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches contemporary discussions on learning motivation by illustrating how Joyful Learning aligns with the principles of *self-determination theory*, *constructivist learning theory*, *positive psychology*, and *student engagement theory*, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms through which enjoyable instructional environments foster students' willingness to learn. Consequently, this study contributes to the advancement of Arabic language pedagogy by providing empirical evidence that emotionally engaging and student-centred instructional practices constitute an effective strategy for strengthening learning motivation within Islamic primary education.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this study offers important pedagogical implications for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers. The findings suggest that Arabic language instruction should move beyond traditional teacher-centred practices toward learning environments that actively involve students through educational games, collaborative discussions, role-playing, vocabulary songs, contextual communication activities, and formative

positive reinforcement. Such instructional practices not only improve students' classroom participation but also cultivate positive emotional experiences that encourage learners to interact confidently with Arabic language content and with their peers. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating the effectiveness of Joyful Learning through a systematic Classroom Action Research design within the relatively underexplored context of Indonesian Islamic primary schools, thereby extending existing research that has predominantly focused on general education or English language instruction. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its implementation in a single classroom involving a relatively small number of participants and by its reliance on qualitative observational evidence, which restricts the transferability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal, mixed-methods, or quasi-experimental designs involving multiple schools and larger participant populations to investigate the long-term effects of Joyful Learning on learning motivation, Arabic language achievement, learner autonomy, foreign language enjoyment, and communicative competence, while also examining the mediating roles of psychological need satisfaction, classroom emotional climate, and teacher instructional competence. Such investigations would provide a more robust empirical foundation for the development of evidence-based motivational pedagogy and further strengthen the international scholarship on Arabic language education and learner motivation.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

The author contributed to designing the research, collecting data through observation and documentation, conducting classroom action research, analyzing the data, and writing the manuscript entitled Implementation of the Joyful Learning Method in Improving Students' Learning Motivation in Arabic Language Subjects at Grade VI of MIS Fard Ahilah, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

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Data availability statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of use artificial intelligence

The author declares that artificial intelligence was used only for language assistance and grammar checking in the preparation of this manuscript.

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