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Deconstructing Arabic Language Instruction: A Love-Based Curriculum Approach to Mitigating Foreign Language Anxiety

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History Artikel	Abstract
Received: January, 16 2026 Revised: February, 20 2026 Accepted: March, 11 2026	Arabic language learning is often trapped in mechanical approaches and rigid grammatical formalism, triggering high levels of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among students. This psycholinguistic phenomenon results in an elevated affective filter, which significantly hinders working memory capacity and the natural language acquisition process. This conceptual article aims to deconstruct the traditional learning paradigm by proposing a Love-Based Curriculum approach as a pedagogical solution. Utilizing a library research method with a traditional literature re-view, this study synthesizes modern psycholinguistic literature and classical Islamic educational philosophy. The findings indicate that reducing FLA cannot be resolved solely through technical methodological improvements; it requires the transformation of the teacher-student relationship from a transactional and punitive nature to one that is relational, appreciative, and dialogical. The integration of values such as love (maḥabbah), empathy, and the creation of a psychologically safe space within the Love-Based Curriculum theoretically proves capable of sup-pressing stress hormones and lowering students' affective filters. In conclusion, through the pedagogy of love, language errors are positioned as a natural process of linguistic development, thereby transforming Arabic lan-guage learning into a humanizing, inclusive, and intimidation-free experience.
Keyword Arabic Learning, Foreign Language Anxiety, Love-Based Curriculum, Affective Pedagogy, Affective Filter	

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Arabic language instruction is frequently trapped in a rigid paradigm of linguistic formalism, where the primary pedagogical focus is placed on mastering grammatical rules (qawā'id) and rote vocabulary memorization, largely neglecting the emotional dimension of the learners. Reality in the field indicates that Arabic is often perceived as an intimidating, complex subject that is far removed from the students' affective reach. This stigma is rooted in traditional methods that are transactional in nature and fail to consider the psychological readiness to receive linguistic input. Consequently, the transmission of linguistic knowledge does not occur organically; rather, it becomes a severe cognitive burden for the learners (Al-Saraj, 2014).

These conditions trigger a psycholinguistic phenomenon known as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). This anxiety encompasses feelings of tension, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence when required to communicate or interact with Arabic language materials (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Research indicates that high levels of anxiety correlate negatively with academic achievement and the willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, 1999). When a student experiences FLA, their working memory capacity is disrupted by intrusive thoughts of failure, thereby hindering the internalization of complex linguistic rules, such as al-ṣaḥīḥ wa al-mu'tall and al-fi'l al-mujarrad wa al-mazīd (Awwad, 2022).

In language acquisition theory, this anxiety phenomenon is profoundly explained through the Affective Filter hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that affective variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence act as a filter that can obstruct linguistic input from reaching the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in the brain (Krashen, 1982). If this "filter" is elevated due to the fear of making mistakes or pressure from the classroom environment, effective language acquisition will not occur, regardless of how well the material is explained. Therefore, reducing these emotional barriers is an absolute prerequisite for successful Arabic language learning (Loreman, 2011).

Ironically, many Arabic language educators still adopt the "banking concept of education" criticized by Paulo Freire, wherein students are treated as empty vessels to be forcefully filled with information (Freire, 2000). This model negates the students' humanity and frequently employs intellectual intimidation as a tool for classroom control. As an antithesis, a paradigmatic deconstruction towards a "Pedagogy of Love" is urgently needed (Zembylas, 2003). From the perspective of classical Islamic education, this concept is not entirely new. Ibn Khaldūn, in *al-Muqaddimah*, warned that harshness and rigidity in teaching extinguish the spirit of learning and damage the learners' human character (Ibn Khaldūn, 2001).

In alignment with this, Imām al-Ghazālī emphasized that an educator must position themselves as a parent to their students, providing unconditional love and preserving their dignity (Al-Ghazālī, n.d.). A relationship founded on love (*al-maḥabbah*) creates a psychologically safe environment. It is within such an environment that the Love-Based Curriculum finds its relevance. This curriculum is not merely a collection of materials; it is a learning ecosystem that integrates empathy, the ethics of care, and the acknowledgment of students' vulnerabilities as integral parts of the learning process (Noddings, 2013).

Implementing a Love-Based Curriculum in Arabic language learning entails deconstructing the absolute authority of the teacher and replacing it with a dialogical relationship. This approach seeks to humanize the Arabic language, making it a living language whose presence is felt in the heart, rather than merely a cold object of structural analysis (Tauhidi, 2001). By feeling loved and valued, students will develop the psychological resilience necessary to navigate the linguistic complexities of Arabic without being haunted by debilitating anxiety (Zembylas, 2003).

This article aims to conceptually explore how the principles of a Love-Based Curriculum can be integrated into Arabic instructional design to mitigate Foreign Language Anxiety. The primary focus of this study is to propose a new framework that synthesizes affective strengths with cognitive excellence, ensuring that Arabic language learning is no longer viewed as a terrifying ordeal, but rather as a joyful spiritual and intellectual journey (Loreman, 2011). Through this deconstruction, it is hoped that a more inclusive and humanistic learning model will emerge for future generations of Arabic language learners (Awwad, 2022).

METODE

This research is a library research study employing a traditional literature review approach. This conceptual research design was selected because its primary objective is to explore, analyze, and synthesize existing literature regarding language anxiety and affective pedagogy to construct novel theoretical arguments. The traditional review allows the researcher to flexibly weave conceptual narratives from diverse literary sources, thereby establishing a philosophical foundation for the implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum within the context of Arabic language education (Snyder, 2019).

The data sources in this study rely entirely on secondary data comprising methodological reference books, scientific journal articles, and classical Islamic literature concerning educational ethics. The literature search focused on two primary domains: psycholinguistic studies on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and philosophical-pedagogical studies on the role of love in education. As a theoretical foundation from the Islamic tradition, classical references such as the book *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by al-Zarnūjī were explored to unearth the historical roots concerning the urgency of sympathy, gentleness, and sincere counsel (*al-syafaqah wa al-naṣīḥah*) from a teacher towards their students (Al-Zarnūjī, 1981).

Data collection techniques were conducted through thematic searches across various academic databases using relevant keywords, such as "Arabic language anxiety," "love-based curriculum," and "affective pedagogy." Specifically, the literature collection was intentionally directed towards studies capturing the cognitive and affective burdens of students when facing high-stakes evaluations based on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), as well as when attempting to comprehend complex morphological rules, such as the classification of *al-ṣaḥīḥ wa al-mu'tall* and *al-fi'l al-mujarrad wa al-mazīd*. The selection of literature highlighting these highly anxiety-inducing materials was undertaken to ensure that the proposed conceptual interventions possess a robust grounding in classroom realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The collected literature data were subsequently analyzed using a qualitative content analysis technique oriented towards conceptual meaning-making. This analytical process involved close reading,

the categorization of major themes connecting the reduction of FLA with affective pedagogical interventions, and the philosophical interpretation of teacher-student relational dynamics. Through this analytical technique, various arguments and findings dispersed across numerous literatures were integrated into a cohesive framework of thought, which functions to deconstruct mechanical teaching approaches towards more humanizing methodologies (Krippendorff, 2018).

The final step in this conceptual writing method was drawing conclusions based on a critical synthesis of the literature findings. The researcher conducted theoretical triangulation by juxtaposing claims from Western literature on positive psychology with classical Middle Eastern literature on educational etiquette and ethics (*adab* and *akhlāq*). This triangulation was performed to ensure that the proposed Love-Based Curriculum concept is not only psychologically valid but also possesses cultural reliability and proximity to the epistemology of Arabic linguistics itself (Zed, 2018).

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

The Anatomy of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in the Context of Arabic Language

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) within the Arabic language classroom is a multidimensional psychological phenomenon that significantly impairs the quality of language acquisition. This phenomenon does not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it is an accumulation of the fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986). In the context of Arabic, FLA exhibits unique characteristics because the cognitive burden borne by students is closely related to the diglossia of the language and grammatical structures (*qawā'id*) that differ vastly from their mother tongue (Taha-Thomure, 2019). This tension causes students to focus more on psychological self-defense mechanisms rather than processing linguistic input naturally (Arnold, 1999).

This cognitive burden peaks when students are confronted with Arabic morphological (*ṣarf*) materials, which feature branching classifications, particularly in the study of *al-ṣaḥīḥ wa al-mu'tall min al-asmā' wa al-af'āl* and *al-fi'l bi al-naẓr ilā tarkībihi (mujarrad wa mazīd)* (Al-Batal, 2007). The complexity of identifying weak letters (*'illah*) or distinguishing between bare and derived verbs is often presented in the form of rigid table memorization, thereby triggering an overwhelming fear of structural errors (Dewaele, 2010). When the students' affective filter is elevated due to this fear, the brain neurologically inhibits the flow of information to the long-term memory center, causing the taught material to evaporate entirely after the class ends (Krashen, 1982).

The demand to integrate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in evaluations can sometimes become a double-edged sword if not accompanied by affective readiness; for instance, the necessity to complete 10 HOTS-type multiple-choice questions on core materials frequently triggers a surge of debilitating anxiety (MacIntyre, 1999). This is exacerbated by rigid instructional exercises that demand absolute precision. Evaluative commands such as, "Fill in the following blank boxes with the correct answers to create a perfect *taṣrīf!* Write completely with the *shakl* or vowel marks!," tend to extinguish students' courage to explore because the error tolerance is perceived to be zero (Young, 1991).

The destructive impact of this anxiety expands beyond grammatical boundaries and paralyzes the communicative function of the language itself. Even in the context of simple daily social communication—such as the intention to formulate a translation and express an apology, "Sorry Ali, yesterday I forgot to invite you to eat" (*Maaf Ali, kemarin saya lupa mengajak kalian makan*)—students often freeze due to excessive worry that their syntactic arrangement (*naḥw*) or lexical choices will sound dissonant or incorrect (Oxford, 1999). Failures in interpersonal communication as minor as this continuously reproduce shame, which ultimately reinforces the students' irrational belief that they possess absolutely no aptitude for learning Arabic (Gregersen, 2005).

Deconstructing the Traditional Paradigm: From Transaction to Relation

Observing the snowball effect of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), it becomes evident that curative efforts can no longer merely revolve around superficial adjustments to instructional methods or the integration of new digital media. These surface-level interventions often fail because they do not address the root of the affective crisis: the underlying philosophy of the pedagogical paradigm itself. The traditional paradigm positions Arabic as a sacred, infallible object of study, while students are relegated to the status of flawed subjects who must be continuously and mechanically corrected (Al-Saraj, 2014). This paradigm fosters an environment where the primary objective is avoiding structural errors rather than achieving meaningful communication, thereby stifling any organic connection the student might develop with the language.

This highly transactional dynamic effectively degrades the educator's role to that of a relentless "grammar corrector" and reduces students to mere memorization machines. Such an environment is particularly detrimental when students are tasked with high-order analytical exercises, as the pressure to perform flawlessly overrides their cognitive capacity to analyze and synthesize linguistic rules. This practice is vehemently opposed in Paulo Freire's humanist pedagogical framework, which critiques the "banking concept" of education (Freire, 2000). In this flawed model, knowledge is seen as a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing, effectively killing intrinsic motivation and breeding a deep-seated fear of academic failure.

To genuinely mitigate FLA and dismantle these oppressive structures, power relations within the classroom must be radically transformed into dialogical and egalitarian relationships. The teacher's epistemic authority—their superior knowledge of complex morphological paradigms or syntactic structures—must not be utilized as an instrument of intellectual intimidation that breeds anxiety (hooks, 2003). Instead, the classroom must be reconstructed as a collaborative community of inquiry. In this new relational paradigm, the educator steps down from the pedestal of absolute authority to become a co-explorer in the language acquisition journey, demonstrating empathy and acknowledging that language learning is inherently fraught with vulnerability.

Conversely, this deconstruction demands a fundamental shift in how language errors are perceived and handled by both educators and students. Educators must begin to view language errors not as academic disgraces or punishable offenses, but as natural, necessary indicators of the students' developing interlanguage (Awwad, 2022). When a student misconjugates a verb or struggles to construct a culturally appropriate social message, it should be met with guided support rather than immediate, harsh correction. The shift from a punitive orientation toward an appreciative, delayed-correction strategy is an absolute prerequisite for lowering the affective filter, thereby allowing students to take the linguistic risks necessary for true fluency (Zembylas, 2003).

Conceptualization of the Love-Based Curriculum in Arabic Language

As a systemic response to this pervasive affective crisis, the Love-Based Curriculum emerges as both a philosophical and operational framework capable of redefining Arabic language education. Based on the *Panduan Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta* (Love-Based Curriculum Guide) published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, this curriculum is intentionally designed to ensure that the entire educational process is animated by principles of affection, unconditional acceptance, and profound respect for the human dignity of the learners (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025). It mandates that every pedagogical decision—from the initial planning of the syllabus and the drafting of evaluation instruments to the micro-interactions that occur within the classroom walls—must be filtered through the lens of compassion.

In the specific context of language acquisition, this pedagogical love is translated into a profound "ethic of care," a concept extensively developed by educational philosophers. Within this ethic, teachers proactively create a psychologically safe space that allows students to be vulnerable without the paralyzing fear of being judged or ridiculed (Noddings, 2013). Language learning intrinsically requires students to abandon their established linguistic identities and attempt communication in unfamiliar, often awkward ways. A safe space guarantees that when students stumble over complex pronunciations or grapple with unfamiliar grammatical rules, their efforts are validated, and their academic self-esteem is meticulously preserved.

Crucially, this concept is not a mere modern psychological invention; it inherently possesses a robust epistemological foundation in the classical Islamic intellectual tradition. Educational figures such as Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarnūjī, in his seminal work *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, have long asserted that an educator must possess the qualities of *shafaqah* (compassion) and *naṣiḥah* (sincere goodwill) towards their students (Al-Zarnūjī, 1981). Al-Zarnūjī emphasized that a teacher should care for their students' intellectual and spiritual well-being just as they would treat their own children. Integrating these classical virtues into contemporary classrooms bridges the gap between historical Islamic pedagogical wisdom and modern psycholinguistic needs.

When the Arabic language curriculum is systematically injected with this core value of *maḥabbah* (love), the entire instructional landscape shifts. The syllabus is no longer viewed by students as a terrifying, burdensome list of target materials and high-stakes evaluations designed to expose their weaknesses. Rather, it becomes a shared roadmap to be navigated collaboratively by teacher and student through continuous, empathetic guidance (Ibn Saḥnūn, 1972). By placing love at the center of the curriculum, the cognitive heavy lifting required to master Arabic is cushioned by an affective safety net, ultimately transforming the pursuit of linguistic proficiency from a source of anxiety into an experience of intellectual joy and mutual respect.

The Mechanism of the Love-Based Curriculum in Mitigating FLA

Mechanistically, the Love-Based Curriculum operates by altering students' neurobiological responses to the Arabic language. A loving learning environment stimulates the production of dopamine and oxytocin—hormones that facilitate social attachment and the joy of learning—while simultaneously suppressing the secretion of cortisol, which triggers stress and anxiety (Willis, 2006). When the brain is in a relaxed mode (low affective filter), working memory capacity operates optimally, allowing students to absorb complex morphological and syntactic rules more intuitively and meaningfully (Loreman, 2011).

To elucidate the structural and affective distinctions between the old paradigm and the new approach, the conceptual framework for the deconstruction of Arabic language learning can be observed in the following comparative table (Noddings, 2013):

Pedagogical Dimension	Traditional Paradigm (Triggers FLA)	Love-Based Curriculum (Mitigates FLA)
Primary Focus	Absolute grammatical accuracy (error avoidance).	Meaningful communication & courage to express.
Attitude Toward Errors	Errors are failures requiring immediate correction.	Errors are natural indicators of the learning process (delayed/empathic correction).
Educator's Role	Absolute authority, corrector, and knowledge transmitter (banking concept).	Facilitator, affective protector, and dialogical partner (ethic of care).
Classroom Climate	Competitive, result-oriented, triggers fear of negative evaluation.	Collaborative, inclusive, creates a psychologically safe space.
Affective Impact	High affective filter, inhibited working memory, low motivation.	Low affective filter, optimal working memory, increased intrinsic motivation.

The table above illustrates that the implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum does not imply eliminating the structural rigor of the Arabic language; rather, it entails wrapping its delivery in a pedagogy of love. Through this deconstruction, the language anxiety that has long stood as a barrier can be dismantled, replaced by a bridge of empathy that transforms Arabic language learning into a humanizing and liberating experience (Al-Qābisī, 1955).

KESIMPULAN

Based on the conceptual exploration outlined above, it can be concluded that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in Arabic language learning is not merely an issue of cognitive deficit or low student intelligence; rather, it is an affective crisis rooted in the fragility of pedagogical relationships. The traditional approach, which overemphasizes rigid grammatical accuracy—particularly in complex subjects such as qawā'id (grammar) and morphology—has cultivated an intimidating classroom climate. This environment elevates the students' affective filter, which in turn obstructs the natural process of language internalization and stifles their courage to communicate.

As a solution to these challenges, the deconstruction of Arabic language instruction is absolutely essential through the implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum. This curriculum offers a fundamental paradigm shift, moving away from an educational model that is transactional and punitive-oriented, toward one that is relational, dialogical, and appreciative. By integrating the ethic of care, alongside the values of maḥabbah (affection), syafaqah (compassion), and naṣiḥah (sincerity) derived from both classical Islamic pedagogical traditions and modern positive psychology, educators transform from mere authoritative figures into affective protectors for their students. Mechanistically, the creation of this psychologically safe space has been shown to effectively reduce the fear of negative evaluation. When students feel unconditionally accepted and language errors are perceived as a natural progression of their developing interlanguage, their cognitive burden is drastically alleviated. This relaxed neurological state facilitates the optimization of working memory, allowing Arabic language acquisition to occur in a manner that is far more intuitive, meaningful, and joyful.

This conceptual framework presents significant implications for educators, curriculum developers, and educational institutions, urging them to re-evaluate the operational standards of Arabic language teaching to ensure a more humanistic approach. The pedagogy of affection must be concretely manifested in instructional design, the delivery of materials, and the methodologies used for providing feedback. Given the conceptual nature of this article, it is highly recommended that future researchers empirically test the

framework of the Love-Based Curriculum in the field. Studies such as Classroom Action Research (CAR) or quasi-experimental designs are critically needed to quantitatively and qualitatively measure the effectiveness of this approach in reducing Arabic language anxiety across various educational tiers.

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