

A Reflective Study on Practical Methods for Developing Arabic Animation Learning Media Using Plotagon Story

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Abstract

The teaching of Arabic across diverse institutions continues to encounter challenges related to student engagement, communicative context, and teachers' capacity to present compelling instructional media. Animated media hold significant potential to enrich learning through the integration of visual, auditory, and narrative elements; however, their production is often perceived as complex and requiring advanced technical skills. This study aims to identify practical methods for producing Arabic-language animated learning media using Plotagon Story, employing a reflective qualitative approach within the Action Research framework developed by Kemmis and McTaggart. Training and mentoring were conducted in three partner pesantren through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Data were collected via reflective interviews, observation of instructional practices, and documentation of the produced animations, and subsequently analysed using Thematic Analysis. The findings indicate that micro-staging, person-to-person mentoring, and hands-on practice constitute key factors in mitigating digital anxiety and enhancing teachers' media literacy. Teachers initially unfamiliar with technology succeeded in producing instructional animations, including *ta'aruf* dialogues, school-related vocabulary, and classroom scenarios. Classroom observations revealed increased student attention, motivation, and comprehension when the teacher-produced animations were utilised. Participants' reflections highlighted professional transformation, particularly in terms of increased self-efficacy and pedagogical awareness regarding the role of animation in providing authentic communicative contexts. The study concludes that Plotagon Story is a practical and accessible tool for developing Arabic-language instructional media, particularly in resource-limited settings. It contributes to the advancement of a simple, effective, and replicable model for training in digital media production.

Keywords: Arabic Language Teaching; Animated Learning Media; Plotagon Story; Teacher Professional Development; Digital Media Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language frequently poses challenges for non-native learners, particularly in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, grammatical mastery, and the application of linguistic forms in everyday communication. Many educational institutions continue to rely on conventional methods such as lecturing, textbooks, and written exercises; however, these approaches often fail to capture students' interest and are less effective in sustaining active engagement. Motivation and retention tend to decline when learning materials are abstract or when instruction is insufficiently contextualised. Consequently, there is a pressing need for innovative learning media capable of providing more interactive, meaningful, and context-rich learning experiences. Animation and audiovisual multimedia constitute one such innovation, as they combine visual, auditory, and narrative elements in a single learning environment. Through this multimodal integration, animation can present social situations, dialogues, and cultural contexts that are difficult to convey through text or lecture alone, thereby enriching students' holistic understanding of the Arabic language.

Building on this pedagogical rationale, a growing body of empirical research demonstrates the effectiveness of animation and multimedia in enhancing learning outcomes, motivation, and student engagement. Studies in diverse settings, including higher education, have reported that learners exposed to animated media show significant improvement in post-test performance compared with control groups (Hat et al., 2025). Research integrating audiovisual materials and interactive multimedia in Arabic language instruction similarly indicates that such media significantly improve listening and speaking skills among non-native learners (Alharizeh et al., 2022; Sajid & Anam, 2024). Evidence from studies involving animated media in other subject contexts further suggests that animation aids the visualisation of abstract concepts, increases intrinsic motivation, and fosters a more enjoyable learning atmosphere that supports long-term retention ((Faisal et al., 2024; Gamayanti & Marzuq, 2021). Together, these findings reinforce the pedagogical potential of animation as an effective medium for language instruction.

Despite these promising outcomes, the practical implementation of animation in educational settings remains constrained. Most existing studies employ professional-grade animation software or conventional video-based production methods, both of which require advanced technical skills, substantial time investment, and significant resource allocation (Damayanti et al., 2018; Syarifah, 2024). These constraints pose barriers for teachers and institutions operating with limited technological capacity, particularly in environments where digital media production infrastructure is minimal. This situation underscores the need for more accessible and efficient alternatives that can be utilised by educators without specialised technical expertise.

One such accessible alternative is character- and story-based animation tools such as Plotagon Story. These tools allow users to select characters, settings, dialogue, and movements to create animations without the complexity of conventional animation or video-editing software. Their user-friendly interface makes them particularly appealing to non-technical teachers seeking to develop instructional materials independently. Moreover, the multimodal affordances of such tools enable the representation of dialogues, communicative scenarios, and cultural contexts—elements that are critical for fostering authentic and contextualised learning experiences in Arabic language education.

However, despite its pedagogical relevance, scholarly literature specifically examining the use of Plotagon Story (or similar tools such as Plotagon Studio) for Arabic language learning remains limited. Existing studies on interactive multimedia in Arabic instruction identify a range of effective media—such as animation, video, and interactive applications—but focus predominantly on learning outcomes (Damayanti et al., 2018; Sapawi & Yusoff, 2025; Syarifah, 2024). Far fewer studies document the production process, the nature of user training, or teachers' reflective experiences in developing and implementing animated materials. This gap highlights the need for empirical research that not only evaluates learner outcomes but also attends to the methodological and experiential dimensions of media creation by educators.

The broader literature affirms the contributions of animated and interactive multimedia to various competencies in Arabic learning—including vocabulary, listening, speaking, and motivation (Akla, 2021; Hat et al., 2025; Zuhdi & Sofyan, 2025). Systematic reviews similarly establish the effectiveness of interactive multimedia in enhancing learning interest, vocabulary mastery, listening comprehension, and grammatical understanding

among non-native learners (Mazlan et al., 2024; Sajid & Anam, 2024; Syarifah, 2024). Yet, these same studies also reveal that much of the existing media production relies on technically demanding software, thereby limiting adoption in resource-constrained educational settings (Damayanti et al., 2018). The key research gap therefore lies in the absence of practical, low-cost, and accessible methods for producing animated instructional media suitable for non-technical teachers. The distinctiveness of the present study emerges from its reflective approach to developing Arabic-language animated media using Plotagon Story, combined with an examination of not only learning outcomes but also the processes of production, training, and user experience.

Guided by this gap, the present study addresses a single research question: How can practical methods for producing Arabic-language animated learning media using Plotagon Story be developed? A reflective investigation into training and mentoring processes is crucial, as it offers two major contributions. First, it provides practical guidelines for educators and media developers seeking to integrate animation into Arabic language instruction. Second, it broadens the field of technology-based learning media by incorporating reflective and participatory perspectives that foreground the lived experiences of teachers during media development. In doing so, this study not only strengthens existing evidence regarding the effectiveness of animation in Arabic learning but also introduces a methodological contribution oriented towards enhancing teachers' practical capacities in an increasingly digital educational landscape.

METHODS

This study employs a reflective qualitative approach using the Action Research design formulated by Kemmis & McTaggart (1988), as the entire sequence of training and mentoring in the creation of Plotagon Story animations unfolded through practical, cyclical stages—namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The training, mentoring, and data collection were conducted concurrently at three partner Islamic educational institutions: Pondok Pesantren Ahlussunnah Waljam'ah NW Brambang in Sekotong, Pondok Pesantren Nujumul Huda NU Batu Samban in Lembar, and Pondok Pesantren NW Darul Musthofa Repok Atas in Keru. During the planning stage, the researchers and facilitators structured the training programme, covering application installation, introduction to core features, character creation, dialogue scripting, and video rendering. A total of 30 Arabic language

teachers participated, divided into three sessions of 10 participants each, corresponding to the three training sites.

The acting stage involved hands-on practice in which participants created animations directly using their personal mobile devices. This was followed by the observing stage, carried out through *participant observation*, allowing the researchers to document real-time technical challenges, participant strategies, and responses to the instructional activities. Reflecting occurred at the end of each session through short reflective discussions and *non-formal interviews*. Of the 30 participants, 16 were randomly selected for these informal interviews to ensure variation in perspectives without imposing restrictive selection criteria. Participants were selected purposively—specifically those actively engaging in the training—and data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, when no new categories or themes emerged. All research procedures adhered to established ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring the protection of participant data.

Data collection employed three primary techniques: (1) *participant observation* during training sessions, enabling close documentation of learning behaviours and technical difficulties; (2) *non-formal interviews* capturing participants' spontaneous reflections on their experiences; and (3) *documentation of videos* produced by participants, serving both as artefacts of learning and as empirical evidence of skill development. All data were transcribed, systematically organised, and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) 2006) to identify patterns related to teachers' experiences, the nature of technical obstacles encountered, problem-solving strategies enacted, and observable developments in participants' digital competencies following mentoring.

The analysis was conducted iteratively, in alignment with the observing–reflecting cycle of Action Research, allowing the researchers to refine analytic focus based on emergent insights from the field. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation of observation, interview, and document data, member checking, and maintenance of an audit trail, consistent with qualitative research standards. This methodological approach provides a comprehensive and contextually grounded account of how teachers applied Plotagon Story within authentic instructional environments and how their digital skills evolved through a cyclical and reflective training process.

RESULTS

The series of training and mentoring activities on the production of Plotagon Story animation media across the three partner pesantren constituted a *spiral of action* in the sense articulated by Kemmis & McTaggart (1988). The process moved through four interdependent and continuously recurring phases—planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Within this framework, the study captured not only the technical dimensions of animation production but also the dynamics of teacher learning, the transformation of professional competence, and the emergence of new pedagogical working patterns within the pesantren context. The following findings are presented in a descriptive–analytical manner by mapping the changes, experiences, and patterns evident in each phase of the cycle.

Planning: Needs Identification, Strategic Design, and Pedagogical Foundations

The planning phase served as both the conceptual and operational foundation of the entire cycle. It extended beyond logistical preparation to include identifying teachers' actual needs through preliminary observations, dialogue with pesantren leaders, and mapping digital literacy levels. Initial data indicated that approximately 85 per cent of teachers were 'passive users' of mobile devices, using their phones only for basic communication and having no experience producing digital learning media. Testimonies from an Arabic teacher, LF—"I do not know where to start", "I am afraid of pressing the wrong button"—highlighted the presence of digital anxiety that needed to be addressed before introducing technical content.

Accordingly, the planning phase was formulated as a pedagogical strategy aimed at: (1) reducing digital anxiety, (2) developing stepwise training (micro-staging), (3) providing intensive personalised mentoring, and (4) requiring hands-on practice in every session. This phase also produced a systematic technical module following the Plotagon Story workflow from scene selection to rendering. Thus, the planning process established a framework responsive to the realities of rural pesantren, characterised by limited devices, minimal digital experience, and the need for a supportive instructional approach.

Acting: Training Implementation, Animation Production, and Practice-Based Mentoring

The acting phase comprised all operational activities: face-to-face and online training, technical demonstrations, storyboard preparation, animation production, and revision of

participants' work. This phase revealed the practical effectiveness of the strategies developed during planning.

Step-by-Step Technical Training

Training was delivered through modelling by the facilitator, followed by guided practice and independent attempts by the teachers. Participants were required to produce animations directly on their mobile phones, following the workflow of selecting scenes, choosing characters, writing dialogue, recording voices, and rendering the video. Field observations demonstrated that this incremental approach was particularly effective for teachers with no prior experience in digital media production. LF noted that “the facilitator directly guided participants using their own phones, practising step by step (Interview, 2025)”, underscoring the centrality of hands-on practice.

Person-to-Person Mentoring as a Key Pedagogical Action

Throughout the sessions, the facilitator moved continuously from one teacher to another to check progress, correct technical mistakes, and provide personalised scaffolding. This form of close mentoring strengthened teachers' mastery experiences and helped alleviate the fear of experimenting with new technology.

Teachers' Creative Engagement in Media Production

As confidence increased, teachers began producing a range of instructional animations, including *ta'aruf* dialogues, school-related vocabulary, classroom scenarios, and simple *qawā'id* videos. AS remarked, “Alhamdulillah, I can make Arabic animation videos even though they are still simple (Interview, 2025),” signalling a shift from being technology users to producers of instructional animation. The acting phase thus represented a point of transition in which technical understanding evolved into concrete production skills.

Observing: Monitoring Transformation, Identifying Constraints, and Recognising Pedagogical Impact

The observing phase included direct monitoring, participant documentation, evaluation of outputs, classroom trials, and reflective interviews. Observation focused on three areas: the development of technical competence, the constraints encountered, and the pedagogical impact of the animations.

Transformation of Technical Competence

Teachers who had never produced digital media were now able to navigate the Plotagon interface and generate one- to two-minute animations. ZH said, “I can now make better videos (Interview, 2025).”

Emerging Constraints

Three categories of challenges were identified: (1) limited training time; (2) difficulty in understanding advanced features, such as sound effects and background music; and (3) external technical constraints, including unstable internet access and limitations within the free version of the application. These findings underscore the need for training designs that consider infrastructural realities in rural pesantren.

Pedagogical Impact of the Animation Media

Classroom trials demonstrated increases in student attention, enthusiasm, and focus. Teachers also reported enhanced confidence in teaching. These results align with multimedia learning theory, which posits that the integration of visual, auditory, and situational contexts strengthens comprehension of abstract linguistic concepts.

Reflecting: Reconstructing Understanding, Critical Appraisal, and Forming a Practical Model

The reflecting phase entailed a systematic re-evaluation of the entire process, generating new insights into the pedagogical role of technology.

Self-Efficacy as a Turning Point

Teacher reflections indicated the emergence of stronger self-efficacy. SPD stated, “I now feel confident that I can produce animation videos independently,” while SUL expressed pride in creating animated videos autonomously. Such reflections highlight a shift in professional identity from passive users to media creators.

Deepened Understanding of the Pedagogical Functions of Animation

Teachers recognised that animation offers more than visual embellishment; it provides visual clarity, situational language contexts, dialogue stimuli, and multimodal learning experiences. WB’s comment—“This can be teaching preparation; we can make it at

home and simply show it at school”—illustrates the integration of animation into instructional planning.

Formation of a Practical Model for Animation Development

Collective reflection produced an emergent practical model: (1) *Planning*: identifying content → preparing storyboards; (2) *Acting*: stepwise practice → production → immediate revision; (3) *Observing*: monitoring feature use → evaluating classroom implementation; (4) *Reflecting*: analysing difficulties → refinement → replanning. This constitutes an action-driven model of continuous professional development.

Collective Reflection through Digital Communities

Discussions in the WhatsApp group extended the PAR cycle autonomously. Teachers exchanged feedback, shared their work, and explored new features, forming a community of practice that supported ongoing competence development.

Across the Action Research cycle, four major findings emerged:

1. Animation production followed a spiral, iterative trajectory, with teachers developing skills through repeated cycles of design, practice, observation, and reflection.
2. Personal mentoring and stepwise practice were decisive, helping to reduce digital anxiety and accelerate mastery of the application.
3. The pedagogical effectiveness of animation was evident, as classroom observations showed increased student engagement and improved vocabulary comprehension.
4. Teacher reflection fostered sustained professional transformation, enabling teachers to transition from passive technology users to autonomous creators of instructional media.

DISCUSSION

Digital animation as a learning medium is firmly grounded in the literature on multimedia learning and language education. Contemporary research demonstrates that animated video can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and retention by integrating visual, auditory, and narrative elements into a single multimodal unit; this integration enables the representation of abstract concepts in more concrete and comprehensible forms (Kleftodimos, 2024). In the context of language learning—including the acquisition of

foreign languages—multimodal presentation allows learners to receive linguistic input in contextualised and multisensory ways. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of animation is highly dependent on the quality of instructional design: it must be developed with careful attention to learning objectives, cognitive load, and content relevance, in order to avoid becoming a source of distraction (Long et al., 2023; Navarrete et al., 2025). For this reason, practical methods for creating animation using Plotagon Story must incorporate pedagogical and design considerations rather than merely technical proficiency.

The practical method identified in this research rests on two core components: stepwise learning (micro-staging) and person-to-person mentoring. By breaking the animation-making process into small, manageable steps—such as selecting scenes, writing dialogue, recording voices, and rendering—teachers who initially lacked technical confidence were able to learn at an achievable pace, experience incremental successes, and gradually build self-efficacy. Empirical data indicate that teachers who previously felt “afraid of pressing the wrong button” became capable of producing simple animations after progressing through these stages with support. In addition, direct facilitator mentoring (adaptive scaffolding) played a crucial role in addressing technical confusion and digital anxiety. This combination enabled deep, progressive mastery of the application rather than superficial, one-off use. This model is significant, as the literature shows that animation and video media are only effective when users (teachers) possess sufficient media literacy and institutional support to manage the production process (Kleftodimos, 2024).

A further outcome of this practical method is the transformation of teachers’ roles from consumers to creators of learning media. When teachers produced their own animations based on Arabic language material—dialogues, vocabulary sets, classroom scenarios—they not only mastered the technical functions of the application but also internalised pedagogical principles: how to present content through narrative form, scénarisation, and visual context. This finding aligns with studies showing that educator-generated animation enhances creativity, media literacy, and teachers’ pedagogical commitment (Kleftodimos, 2024; Listia et al., 2025). Thus, the practical method developed here not only results in the creation of media but also cultivates teacher capacity as instructional designers—an epistemically higher position than that of a mere “media user”.

Evidence from the wider literature further supports the effectiveness of teacher-produced animation for improving student learning outcomes. Experimental studies have

shown that students taught with animation demonstrate greater attention, motivation, and retention than those taught through traditional methods (Carmichael et al., 2018; Rakhman et al., 2024; Rashid et al., 2024). In language learning contexts, animation enables the representation of dialogues, communicative situations, and cultural contexts, allowing vocabulary and grammatical structures to be internalised more naturally. This is particularly important for languages such as Arabic, where communicative competence requires situational clarity and cultural contextualisation beyond what rote memorisation or text-based approaches can offer.

However, the use of animation in education is not without significant challenges and limitations. The literature emphasises that poorly designed video or animation—such as those overloaded with irrelevant visuals or produced in ways that render learners passive—may lose pedagogical value or even hinder learning (Long et al., 2023; Navarrete et al., 2025). Technical demands (devices, connectivity, production time), teachers' media literacy, and the additional workload associated with media production are critical factors influencing the sustainability of any practical method. Without mentoring, training, and institutional support, initial success in pilot phases may be difficult to sustain.

In the broader literature on language and multimedia education, the use of animation as a learning medium is strongly supported, particularly due to its capacity to enhance motivation, engagement, and comprehension through multimodal integration (Kleftodimos, 2024). Empirical studies demonstrate that animation simplifies abstract concepts and improves retention and learner interest more effectively than traditional methods (Akla, 2021; Chattopadhyay, 2025; Faruk et al., 2022). In the context of Arabic language learning within pesantren, animation produced with tools such as Plotagon Story enables the representation of dialogues, communicative situations, and cultural contexts that are otherwise difficult to convey through memorisation-based or text-oriented approaches. Thus, animation functions not merely as “visual decoration” but as a pedagogical instrument capable of grounding language content in contextualised and meaningful ways (Febriani et al., 2025).

The practical method found effective in this study consists of two primary components: micro-staging and person-to-person scaffolding. By decomposing the animation-production workflow into small instructional steps—scene selection, character assignment, dialogue writing, voice recording, and rendering—teachers with low digital

literacy could progress in manageable stages and gain early successes that fostered confidence. Interviews revealed that teachers who initially expressed hesitation or fear of error were able to complete simple animations with intensive mentoring. Furthermore, direct scaffolding helped them overcome technical barriers and digital anxiety, resulting in a more adaptive and responsive learning process (Faculty, 2021). This combination is consistent with findings in the literature which assert that the effectiveness of educational animation depends on user readiness and the presence of technical and pedagogical support (Graziano, 2012; Kleftodimos, 2024).

The transformation of teachers from media consumers to media creators represents a major contribution of this method (Paskevicius, 2021). When teachers design animations based on Arabic language materials—whether scenarios, vocabulary, or classroom dialogues—they not only acquire technical skills but also internalise pedagogical strategies for presenting content in narrative and contextual forms. This aligns with research showing that educator-led animation development increases creativity, media literacy, and engagement in pedagogical design (Graziano, 2012; Kleftodimos, 2024). Consequently, the practical method does not merely teach tool usage but positions teachers as instructional designers—a significantly more advanced epistemic role than that of a traditional instructor.

Integrating the empirical findings with the international literature yields several design principles for a practical method of developing Arabic-language learning animation using Plotagon Story: (1) stepwise learning through micro-staging to accommodate teachers' digital literacy levels; (2) adaptive scaffolding for both technical and affective support; (3) teacher-generated production to ensure pedagogical and contextual relevance; (4) pedagogically oriented animation design—featuring contextual content, dialogues, and authentic scenarios; and (5) institutional support and resources to ensure sustainability. These principles integrate technical, pedagogical, and contextual needs in a coherent framework.

When implemented consistently, the practical method described here demonstrates that animation is not merely an auxiliary visual tool but a pedagogical medium capable of transforming Arabic language teaching practices in pesantren and other resource-constrained schools (Rahimi et al., 2021). This transformation occurs because animation provides contextualized, dynamic representations of linguistic concepts that are often difficult to convey through traditional, text-based instruction. Moreover, by engaging multiple senses,

animated materials enhance learners' motivation and retention, allowing students with diverse learning styles to grasp abstract grammatical or semantic structures more effectively (Jung, 2014). Nevertheless, the long-term success of such innovations depends on the quality of instructional design and the teacher's pedagogical competence in integrating animation meaningfully rather than superficially. Therefore, sustained institutional support, including continuous training and access to digital infrastructure, is essential to ensure that this approach evolves from an experimental novelty into a sustainable educational practice that empowers both teachers and learners.

CONCLUSION

This reflective study demonstrates that a practical method for producing Arabic-language instructional animation using Plotagon Story can be effectively implemented through the planning–acting–observing–reflecting cycle proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart. Training across the three partner pesantren showed that teachers who initially functioned as 'passive users' of digital devices underwent a significant transformation into creators of learning media. The combined use of micro-staging, personalised mentoring, and hands-on practice proved essential in reducing digital anxiety and fostering teacher self-efficacy. Engagement in animation production encouraged teachers to internalise pedagogical principles, design contextual dialogues and scenarios, and deliver more dynamic, multimodal, and communicative Arabic language instruction. Classroom observations further indicated that teacher-produced animation enhanced students' focus, motivation, and engagement.

Theoretically, this study broadens understanding of how Participatory Action Research can be applied in the development of digital learning media, particularly within pesantren-based education. The findings indicate that teachers' digital literacy can be strengthened through a collaborative and adaptive reflective cycle. Practically, the study offers a replicable model suitable for Arabic language teachers working in resource-limited environments. For policymakers and educational institutions, the results suggest that integrating animation into the curriculum does not require advanced technology but instead demands responsive training design, institutional support, and sustained communities of practice. The Plotagon Story production model represents a cost-efficient, user-friendly, and

contextually relevant solution for non-technical teachers seeking to create meaningful language-learning experiences.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in three rural pesantren, and thus generalisation must be approached cautiously. Variations in digital infrastructure, device capacity, and institutional support may influence outcomes in other contexts. Second, the research concentrated on teachers' processes of creating and using animation, rather than long-term quantitative measurement of student learning outcomes. Third, the partially paid features of Plotagon Story and its reliance on stable internet access limited the exploration of more advanced functionalities. Future research is needed to examine long-term effectiveness, develop more comprehensive training models, and explore the integration of animation with other digital learning platforms.

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