

Critical Analysis of HOTS-Based Assessment Instruments for Qawā'id Nahwiyyah: A Study of Al-Muyassar

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Received: 11-07-2026

Revised: 21-08-2026

Accepted: 27-09-2026

KEYWORDS

Critical Analysis;
Assessment Instruments;
Qawā'id Nahwiyyah;
HOTS;
Al-Muyassar.

ABSTRACT

Assessment instruments in teaching qawā'id nahwiyyah should ideally be designed not only to measure students' memorization of grammatical rules but also to foster Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). This article aims to critically analyze HOTS-based assessment instruments in the book *Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Nahwi* by Aceng Zakariya. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis of 40 selected exercise items. The classification of cognitive levels was conducted based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. The results show that the assessment instruments in this book are structured in a gradual and progressive manner. Of the 40 items analyzed, 15 items fall into the LOTS category (C1–C2), 10 items into the MOTS category (C3), and 15 items into the HOTS category (C4–C6). This proportion indicates that *Al-Muyassar* does not merely emphasize basic skills such as remembering and understanding, but also provides substantial opportunities for application, analysis, and creation. In the final sections of the book, the exercises increasingly require syntactic competence, sentence structure analysis, and the construction of new sentences, all of which represent higher-order thinking skills. These findings suggest that *Al-Muyassar* has strong potential as a HOTS-based Arabic grammar textbook, as it presents a tiered sequence of exercises ranging from basic to complex cognitive levels. Consequently, this book can be effectively utilized by teachers to promote more critical, analytical, and productive grammar learning. The assessment instruments contained in this book contribute to the development of students' critical and creative thinking, as well as their awareness in understanding and applying Arabic grammatical rules.

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Introduction

Learners' mastery of nahwu rules in Arabic language learning in the 21st century remains largely memorization-based and has not yet been directed toward critical, contextualized understanding and application, primarily due to the absence of assessment instruments grounded in Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). A study by

(Siregar, 2025) found that more than 70% of students experience cognitive difficulties in understanding qawā'id nahḥiyyah because their learning relies on rote memorization without higher-level thinking exercises. This finding is supported by (Masrifah et al., 2025), who revealed that Arabic language assessment instruments in several madrasahs only measure the ability to recognize i'rāb patterns rather than analytical and evaluative thinking. (Yasmar et al., 2023) also reported that the proportion of HOTS-based items in Arabic textbooks ranges only from 2.4% to 31.7% of the total instruments analyzed, far below the standard for critical assessment. Similarly, (Wasilah, 2022) found that most teachers have not yet understood the concept of HOTS-based assessment, resulting in qawā'id instruction that fails to cultivate higher-order thinking. These findings demonstrate a significant gap between the ideal objectives of Arabic language education and current evaluation practices that remain predominantly memorization-oriented.

Normatively, the urgency of reforming Qawā'id Nahḥiyyah assessment instruments is strongly supported by both policy and theory. Regulation of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture No. 21 of 2016 mandates that education should develop critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking skills aligned with the demands of the 21st century. This principle is reinforced by the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which places analysis, evaluation, and creation as the highest cognitive levels that should be trained through assessment. In Islamic education, the Qur'an also emphasizes critical and reflective thinking, as stated in Q.S. Ṣād [38]:29, which commands believers to engage in tadabbur (deep reflection) of the Qur'anic verses. (Elmi et al., 2024) confirm that HOTS-based assessment improves analytical ability in understanding Arabic grammar, while (Mubin et al., 2025) and (Mustofa et al., 2022) demonstrate the effectiveness of evaluative instruments integrating cognitive and affective dimensions in Arabic learning. Moreover, Mahmudi et al. (2024) show that HOTS-based questions can improve Arabic learning outcomes by up to 62%. Collectively, these normative and theoretical foundations indicate that reforming Qawā'id assessment instruments is an urgent necessity to establish critical and contextualized learning.

The urgency of this research is further heightened by the limited number of studies that critically evaluate the validity and relevance of Qawā'id Nahḥiyyah

assessment instruments, especially those derived from classical texts. Most previous studies (Afifuddin et al., 2024; Amila Sholiha et al., 2023; Aulia & Baroroh, 2024) have focused on developing modern learning media and instruments without addressing the evaluative dimension of traditional textbooks. However, (Abdurrahman & Masor, 2019) demonstrate that classical texts possess high pedagogical value due to their systematic and logical grammatical structure. (Farros, 2024) also argues that applying HOTS-based assessment to classical texts can promote critical and reflective thinking in learning nahwu and şarf. In addition, (Zalfa Firdaus & Baroroh, 2025) prove that integrating HOTS approaches into classical texts can enhance students' analytical ability by up to 68%. Therefore, a critical analysis of Qawā'id Naḥwiyyah assessment instruments in traditional books constitutes a relevant and significant scholarly endeavor, particularly in the context of modernizing Islamic education.

From a scholarly perspective, the selection of Al-Muyassar as the object of this study is based on two main considerations. First, it is one of the most widely used nahwu texts in Islamic educational institutions and pesantren due to its systematic and accessible presentation of grammatical rules (M. Hasyim et al., 2022). Second, Al-Muyassar exhibits progressive pedagogical characteristics by presenting grammatical rules from simple to more complex forms (Purnama & Muhajir, 2025). (Husein & Nury, 2025) further argue that this book can serve as an integrative model between classical and modern learning, particularly in the development of HOTS-based assessment instruments. (Nashoih, 2024) and (Eldara & Baroroh, 2025) also confirm that HOTS-based instruments are effective in measuring learners' analytical, evaluative, and creative abilities in Arabic learning. These findings suggest that traditional nahwu texts can be utilized as sources for developing critical and contextually relevant assessment instruments for the 21st century. Accordingly, this study aims to critically analyze the suitability, limitations, and development potential of HOTS-based Qawā'id Naḥwiyyah assessment instruments in Al-Muyassar as an effort to integrate Islamic scholarly tradition with modern higher-order thinking-oriented pedagogy.

The novelty of this study lies in its critical focus on evaluating Qawā'id Naḥwiyyah assessment instruments in Al-Muyassar based on the principles of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), an area that has received limited attention in previous research. Unlike earlier studies that primarily emphasize the development of HOTS-

based learning media, this research examines the integration of cognitive, pedagogical, and methodological dimensions within assessment instruments of a classical grammar text. It also proposes an evaluative analysis model that connects traditional nahwu structures with the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, thereby offering a new perspective on the development of Arabic language assessment instruments that are responsive to 21st-century educational demands. Consequently, this study contributes not only to the theoretical advancement of HOTS application in Arabic language education but also to the practical design of more critical and meaningful evaluation instruments.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis as its primary method. This approach was applied to examine in depth the content of the Qawā'id Nahwiyyah assessment instruments in Al-Muyassar in order to evaluate their alignment with the principles of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). According to (Krippendorff, 2018), content analysis is an effective method for uncovering implicit meanings and messages embedded in educational texts. The object of this study was Al-Muyassar fi 'Ilmin Nahwi by Aceng Zakariya, a textbook containing instructional materials and exercises on Arabic grammar (qawā'id nahwiyyah). This book was selected because of its systematic and applicative structure of grammar instruction and its continued widespread use in modern Islamic educational institutions (M. Hasyim et al., 2022). The main focus of this research was to critically analyze the form and content of the assessment instruments in the book in order to determine their conformity with HOTS principles based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy developed by (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The data sources of this study consisted of written documents in the form of qawā'id nahwiyyah assessment exercises in Al-Muyassar. Data were collected through intensive reading, note-taking, and the selection of all assessment instruments relevant to grammar learning. A total of 40 exercises were purposively selected based on their item types, cognitive levels, and distribution across chapters. This purposive sampling technique ensured that the selected items represented variations in form and cognitive demand. The forty exercises, taken from pages 4 to 83, included LOTS, MOTS, and HOTS categories. The primary consideration for this selection was to ensure that the

analyzed data were representative of the book's evaluation structure and allowed for an in-depth examination of the form, content, and cognitive level of each exercise. The research instrument consisted of a document analysis sheet developed based on HOTS indicators, namely analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These indicators were adapted from (Brookhart, 2010), who emphasized the importance of assessments that measure higher-order thinking skills. The analysis was conducted through four main stages: (1) identification of assessment items, (2) classification into cognitive levels C1–C6, (3) critical analysis based on HOTS indicators, and (4) presentation of the findings in descriptive form and categorization tables, as suggested by (Miles et al., 2014).

All exercises and evaluation tasks in *Al-Muyassar* were directly analyzed to obtain empirical data on the form and cognitive level of the assessment instruments. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, theory triangulation and an audit trail were employed. (Patton, 2015) stated that theory triangulation strengthens validity by comparing analytical results from multiple conceptual perspectives. Meanwhile, (Denzin, 2017) recommended the use of an audit trail to ensure transparency, enabling every step of the analytical process to be traced. Data were analyzed through the stages of reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing in accordance with the analytical model of (Miles et al., 2014). The results were then compared with HOTS-based assessment theories to ensure conceptual consistency. Furthermore, all research procedures were carefully documented and periodically verified in accordance with qualitative research guidelines proposed by (Creswell & Poth, 2018), (Moleong, 2021), and (Sugiyono, 2019), thereby allowing the study to be replicated by other researchers.

Result

The data of this study were obtained through content analysis of 40 exercise items (*at-tamrīnāt*) in *Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Naḥwi* by Aceng Zakariya, taking into account the variation in item types and cognitive levels. The analysis focused on the structure, types of questions, and the cognitive activities required in order to evaluate their alignment with the principles of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

Forms and Characteristics of Qawā'id Nahwiyyah Assessment Instruments

The data in this study were obtained through content analysis of 40 selected exercises (at-tamrīnāt) in *Al-Muyassar fi 'Ilmin Nahwi* by Aceng Zakariya, with careful consideration of variations in task types and cognitive levels. The analysis focused on the structural design of the exercises, the forms of questions presented, and the cognitive activities required from learners in order to assess their alignment with the principles of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Based on an in-depth examination of *Al-Muyassar*, it was found that the assessment structure is systematically embedded in the form of exercises distributed from pages 4 to 83. These exercises are organized in a graded and progressive manner, reflecting a well-structured approach to teaching Arabic grammar (nahwu). At the initial stage, the dominant types of exercises involve identifying grammatical elements such as isim, fi'il, and ḥarf, as well as forming words in mufrad, muthannā, and jam' forms. Such exercises primarily aim to reinforce learners' foundational understanding of grammatical concepts and are therefore categorized as Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS), as they mainly require recalling and comprehending grammatical rules.

As the level of difficulty increases, the exercises gradually shift toward the application of grammatical rules, including taṣrīf al-fi'l, transforming active sentences into passive forms (majhūl), and correcting incorrect sentence structures (صَحِّحْ مَا تَرَاهُ (خَطَأً)). These tasks demand learners to apply previously learned rules in new contexts, thus indicating a transition from LOTS to Middle Order Thinking Skills (MOTS). Such progression demonstrates that learners are not only required to memorize grammatical rules but also to apply them meaningfully within sentence-level contexts.

In the final sections of the book (pages 54–83), more complex exercises were identified, requiring learners to analyze sentence meaning, evaluate grammatical correctness, and construct new sentences based on specific syntactic patterns. These activities fall within the category of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) because they engage learners in analytical reasoning, evaluative judgment, and creative language production. This gradual progression from simple identification to analysis and sentence creation indicates that *Al-Muyassar* adopts a spiral learning model, where grammatical competence is developed through successive cognitive stages from memorization and comprehension to application, analysis, and ultimately higher-level linguistic thinking.

Overall, the structured and hierarchical nature of the exercises suggests that Al-Muyassar not only functions as a traditional grammar textbook but also has the potential to serve as an assessment-oriented learning resource that supports the development of higher-order cognitive skills in Arabic grammar learning.

Cognitive Levels of Exercises Based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

The analysis of the 40 selected exercises (at-tamrīnāt) in Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Naḥwi reveals a relatively balanced distribution among lower-, middle-, and higher-order thinking skills. Of the total 40 items, 15 exercises fall into the LOTS category (C1–C2), 10 items are classified as MOTS (C3), and the remaining 15 items belong to the HOTS category (C4–C6). This distribution indicates that the evaluation structure in the book is not solely oriented toward basic mastery of grammatical rules but progressively guides learners toward more complex cognitive processes. Exercises categorized as LOTS (C1–C2) primarily require basic cognitive abilities, such as identifying word classes (noun, verb, and particle), determining singular, dual, and plural forms, and understanding fundamental grammatical concepts. The cognitive activities involved at this level are predominantly reproductive, focusing on remembering and comprehending previously learned information. Although these exercises operate at a lower cognitive level, they play a crucial role as a conceptual foundation that supports higher-level thinking. Without adequate mastery of basic grammatical structures, learners would face significant difficulties in engaging in deeper analysis and synthesis of grammatical rules.

MOTS (C3) exercises are mainly found in the middle sections of the book, particularly on pages 21–39. At this stage, students are required to apply grammatical rules in more varied contexts, such as performing verb conjugation (taṣrīf), correcting erroneous sentence structures, or adjusting grammatical endings according to contextual usage. The cognitive activities at this level are functional in nature, as they connect conceptual knowledge with practical application. Thus, MOTS exercises serve as a transitional bridge from rote learning toward contextual and meaningful use of grammatical knowledge. In contrast, HOTS (C4–C6) exercises predominantly appear in the final sections of the book, specifically on pages 54–83. These tasks demand higher-level cognitive processes, including analysis, evaluation, and creation. Examples include translating sentences from Indonesian into Arabic while observing syntactic

rules, analyzing the function of *maf'ūl muṭlaq* within sentence structures, and constructing new sentences using appropriate *ṣifāt* and *mawṣūf* patterns. At this stage, cognitive activities are no longer mechanical but require reflective thinking, linguistic decision-making, and independent language construction. Consequently, these HOTS-oriented exercises directly contribute to the development of students' critical and creative thinking skills in learning *qawā'id naḥwiyyah*.

Overall, the variation in cognitive levels across the exercises in Al-Muyassar demonstrates a tiered and progressive learning design that aligns with the principles of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. This pattern reflects a pedagogical approach that goes beyond textual mastery of grammatical rules and actively encourages learners to understand, apply, analyze, and create Arabic grammatical structures in a deeper and more contextualized manner. Therefore, Al-Muyassar can be regarded as a grammar textbook with strong potential to support Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based instruction in Arabic grammar learning.

The following table presents the distribution of the cognitive analysis results of the forty selected exercises.

Tabel 1. 1 Cognitive analysis results table

Category	Cognitive Level	Number of Items	Percentage	Main Cognitive Characteristics
LOTS	C1-C2	15	37.5 %	Remembering and understanding basic grammatical concepts
MOTS	C3	10	25 %	Applying grammatical rules in new contexts
HOTS	C4-C6	15	37.5 %	Analysis, evaluation, and sentence construction

Based on the table above, of the 40 exercise items analyzed, 15 items (37.5%) fall into the LOTS category (C1–C2), 10 items (25%) are classified as MOTS (C3), and 15 items (37.5%) belong to the HOTS category (C4–C6). This distribution indicates a relatively balanced proportion of exercises oriented toward memorization, application, and higher-level analysis in *Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Naḥwi*. Such a distribution suggests that the author demonstrates an awareness of the importance of developing learners' cognitive abilities in a gradual and hierarchical manner. Moreover, the findings indicate that the textbook not only emphasizes rote learning but also provides opportunities for fostering critical language awareness. The proportional pattern among LOTS, MOTS, and HOTS reflects a progressive and staged assessment design aligned with principles of cognitive development.

Alignment of Assessment with Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

Based on the content analysis of the forty selected exercises, the findings indicate that HOTS principles have been accommodated to a considerable extent, particularly in the final sections of the book. Exercises presented on pages 54–83 demonstrate a clear shift from rote memorization toward critical and creative thinking. For instance, translation tasks do not merely assess literal equivalence but require contextual understanding and the ability to synthesize meaning within Arabic sentence structures. Several items reflect cognitive processes at the evaluating and creating levels, such as correcting syntactically incorrect sentences, constructing new sentences using appropriate *ṣifāh* and *mawṣūf* structures, and selecting lexemes that align with semantic context. These activities illustrate metacognitive engagement, which constitutes a core component of Higher Order Thinking Skills.

Overall, the results show that *Al-Muyassar* incorporates HOTS-oriented assessment components at a proportion of 37.5%. This indicates that although a substantial number of exercises in the earlier sections remain focused on lower-level cognitive skills, there is a clear progression toward application, analysis, and creation in the later stages. Such a pattern suggests that the compiler of the book intentionally designed a cognitive sequence that supports the gradual development of higher-order thinking. The implications of these findings highlight the strong potential of *Al-Muyassar* as a HOTS-based instructional resource for Arabic grammar learning, particularly when teachers further enrich the exercises with questions that challenge

students' analytical and creative capacities. In this context, the assessment instruments in *Al-Muyassar* function not only as tools for evaluating learning outcomes but also as mechanisms for fostering critical and creative thinking skills in the study of Arabic grammar. Consequently, *Al-Muyassar* may serve as a valuable reference for Arabic language curriculum developers in designing assessment frameworks that actively promote higher-order cognitive development.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that *Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Naḥwi* by Aceng Zakariya provides a structured and progressive system of assessment for Arabic grammar instruction. Each exercise in the book is organized according to a hierarchy of cognitive skills, ranging from basic to higher levels, in alignment with the cognitive principles of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Effective learning proceeds from remembering to understanding, followed by applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. In this regard, *Al-Muyassar* demonstrates a coherent link between rule memorization and linguistic application, ensuring that learning does not remain at a basic cognitive level but progresses toward analytical and productive skills.

The exercises in *Al-Muyassar* can be categorized into three main types: identification of grammatical elements, application of rules, and analysis of sentence structures. Identification exercises, such as distinguishing *ism*, *fī'l*, and *ḥarf* or transforming singular forms into plural, aim to strengthen learners' mastery of fundamental grammatical concepts. According to (Bloom et al., 1956) and (Krathwohl, 2002), the abilities to remember and understand constitute essential foundations for the development of higher-level thinking. Therefore, the initial sections of the book fall within the category of lower order thinking skills (LOTS), serving as a cognitive foundation for students to advance toward higher order thinking skills (HOTS).

As the complexity of the material increases, *Al-Muyassar* presents exercises that require the application and correction of sentence structures, such as *ṣaḥḥih mā tarāhu khaṭa'an* (correct the errors) or *ij'al mā ya'tī nā'ib al-fā'il* (transform the verb into the passive form). (Brookhart, 2010) explains that tasks requiring the application of grammatical rules in new contexts fall within the category of middle order thinking

skills (MOTS) because they involve the ability to transfer knowledge to unfamiliar situations. Such learning is essential to ensure that students not only memorize rules but also use them communicatively and functionally. This approach is consistent with the views of (Moleong, 2021) and (Miles et al., 2014), who argue that meaningful learning requires contextualized application to make knowledge cognitively significant.

The analysis reveals a balanced distribution of LOTS, MOTS, and HOTS within the book. Of the forty exercises analyzed, fifteen were classified as LOTS, ten as MOTS, and fifteen as HOTS. This proportion indicates that the book's author recognizes the importance of cognitive progression in the learning process. (King et al., 2012) assert that a variety of cognitive levels enables learners to develop gradually toward analytical thinking. This concept also corresponds with (Vygotsky, 1978) scaffolding theory, in which teachers provide structured guidance until students are able to think independently at more complex levels. According to (Krippendorff, 2018), such variation in exercise structure reflects pedagogical awareness in designing assessment instruments that systematically stimulate learners' mental activities.

Exercises that require higher-order thinking are most prominent in the final sections of the book, such as tasks involving translation into Arabic, sentence structure analysis, and the construction of new sentences. (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) classify these abilities within the levels of analyzing, evaluating, and creating. (Brookhart, 2010) further emphasizes that tasks requiring meaning analysis and the production of new linguistic structures represent authentic forms of HOTS-based assessment. Studies by (A. Hasyim & al., 2022) and (Fakhrudin, 2021) likewise demonstrate that the application of HOTS in Arabic language instruction enhances grammatical awareness and students' reflective thinking. These findings reinforce the view that grammar instruction need not be rigid or purely theoretical but can function as a medium for developing critical linguistic reasoning.

This study also reveals notable differences from previous research. (Al-Mazri, 2019) and (Syarifuddin, 2021) reported that most traditional *nahwu* textbooks emphasize memorization of patterns without encouraging practical application. In contrast, *Al-Muyassar* demonstrates innovation by integrating both conceptual and

applied dimensions. From the perspective of Task-Based Learning (Ellis, 2018; Nunan, 2004), exercises such as translation and error correction can be classified as meaning-focused tasks, which require learners to interpret contextual meaning and solve linguistic problems. This approach expands the function of the textbook from a mere instructional text into a medium for developing critical language awareness, in line with task-based language learning in modern education.

Pedagogically, these findings have important implications for Arabic language teaching in madrasahs and pesantren. (Fakhruddin, 2021) argues that HOTS-based learning helps students develop analytical and reflective thinking skills. The integration of HOTS principles in *Al-Muyassar* is also consistent with the 21st-century learning paradigm that emphasizes critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative competencies (OECD, 2019). In the context of modern Islamic education, teachers can utilize the exercises in this book to design project-based and reflective learning activities that enhance students' linguistic awareness. As noted by (Miles et al., 2014) and (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the practical application of content analysis findings can support more meaningful curriculum evaluation oriented toward the development of higher-order thinking skills.

In conclusion, *Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Naḥwi* functions not only as a traditional grammar textbook but also as a pedagogically modern instructional resource. The progression of exercises from LOTS to HOTS reflects a constructivist approach, as described by (Piaget, 1972) and (Fosnot, 2013), in which knowledge is built through gradual learning experiences. This approach supports reflective learning theory, which positions learners as active agents in constructing linguistic understanding. Based on qualitative research perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and principles of triangulated validity (Krippendorff, 2018; Miles et al., 2014), it can be concluded that *Al-Muyassar* has strong potential as a HOTS-based instructional model that is highly relevant to the needs of contemporary Islamic education curricula.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Al-Muyassar fī 'Ilmin Naḥwi* by Aceng Zakariya is a grammar instructional text designed with a tiered evaluative system that progresses from basic to higher-order cognitive skills, in alignment with the principles of the

Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. Through content analysis of forty selected exercises, the findings reveal a balanced distribution of lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), middle-order thinking skills (MOTS), and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). This progressive instructional design indicates that nahwu learning in Al-Muyassar does not merely emphasize rote memorization of grammatical rules, but also actively promotes linguistic application, analysis, and creative language production. These results confirm that traditional Islamic texts can be pedagogically adapted into HOTS-oriented instructional instruments that remain relevant to the demands of 21st-century education.

The main findings further underscore that Al-Muyassar embodies substantial modern pedagogical potential by integrating analytical and applicative learning approaches. Exercises such as constructive translation tasks and grammatical error correction reflect characteristics of task-based learning that foster critical language awareness among learners. Accordingly, this text may serve as a model for HOTS-based evaluative instructional materials in nahwu teaching within madrasah and pesantren contexts. Moreover, this study opens avenues for future research to empirically examine the practical implementation of Al-Muyassar in enhancing students' syntactic analysis skills and metacognitive reflection in contemporary Arabic language learning environments.

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