

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ARABIC LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AMONG 10TH GRADE STUDENT (A CASE STUDY AT RELIGIOUS PROGRAM OF MAN 1 BATAM)

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges and opportunities in Arabic language acquisition among 10th-grade students in the Religious Program at MAN 1 Batam. Arabic, as a cornerstone of Islamic education, holds significant value for students in Indonesia, yet its complex grammar, distinct script, and limited real-life application present obstacles for non-native speakers. This research employs a qualitative case study approach, involving interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations with students and teachers to examine linguistic challenges, motivational factors, and institutional support in language learning. Findings reveal that grammar rules and vocabulary acquisition are major challenges for students, compounded by a lack of intrinsic motivation and limited exposure to Arabic outside the classroom. The study identifies traditional teaching methods as a potential barrier to engagement, suggesting that communicative, interactive approaches may enhance learning effectiveness. Extracurricular programs, such as language clubs, along with digital resources and culturally relevant content, are recommended to foster deeper engagement and practical language application. These insights provide valuable recommendations for improving Arabic language acquisition in religious educational settings, with an emphasis on enriching teaching strategies, expanding resource accessibility, and promoting extracurricular involvement.

Keywords: Arabic language acquisition, language challenges, motivation, pedagogical approaches, extracurricular activities.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language acquisition is an essential element of Islamic education, especially within countries like Indonesia where understanding religious texts, such as the Quran, is highly valued. For Indonesian students in religious programs, like those at MAN 1 Batam, mastering Arabic opens doors to deeper spiritual understanding and enriches their religious identity. However, Arabic poses significant linguistic challenges due to its distinct grammar, script, and phonetics, all of which differ greatly from the Indonesian language. This foundational gap creates a need for effective pedagogical approaches that can bridge students' existing knowledge with Arabic linguistic complexities (Setiadi & Khairunnisa, 2023).

In Indonesia, Arabic is introduced early in religious educational institutions, especially in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN), which are designed to prepare students not only academically but also spiritually. The Religious Program at MAN 1 Batam, one of the prominent religious schools in Batam, takes on the mission to instill proficiency in Arabic among its students. Despite

institutional support, however, students encounter difficulties that often hinder their mastery of the language, particularly when it comes to grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

The challenges that students face are compounded by the limited exposure to Arabic outside of the classroom. Unlike more widely spoken languages, Arabic does not frequently appear in students' daily environments or in social media, making it less accessible and relatable. Consequently, students may lack the motivation to engage fully in learning Arabic, viewing it primarily as an academic requirement rather than a functional language with practical applications. This perception can lead to a lack of enthusiasm and lower levels of engagement in language classes (Salim, 2024).

Beyond motivational barriers, the traditional teaching methods used in many Indonesian religious schools may not always cater to students' diverse learning needs. At MAN 1 Batam, teachers often employ grammar-focused, rote-learning methods which, while useful for foundational understanding, may not be sufficient to develop conversational fluency. These methods can also feel monotonous for students, as they do not offer the interactive and immersive experiences that have been shown to support language retention and practical use.

Research on Arabic language acquisition in non-Arabic-speaking contexts has highlighted a range of challenges, especially regarding linguistic, motivational, and pedagogical aspects. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016) examined difficulties that non-native speakers face, such as understanding the Arabic script, complex grammar, and morphology, all of which require unique instructional approaches for effective learning. Gardner (1985) underscored the importance of motivation in language acquisition, showing that intrinsic interest in a language contributes significantly to language proficiency. However, in Indonesian madrasahs, Arabic is often perceived as an academic requirement rather than a functional skill, leading to lower motivation among students (Fatimah & Wahid, 2022).

Furthermore, research by Khan (2020) suggested that interactive and communicative teaching methods yield better results than traditional, grammar-focused instruction, as they facilitate vocabulary retention and sentence structure comprehension. Additional studies, such as those by Mahdi and Azmi (2023), have explored the impact of technology in language learning, finding that digital tools can enhance engagement and support learning beyond the classroom.

The present study differs from prior research by focusing specifically on Arabic language acquisition challenges and opportunities among 10th-grade students at the Religious Program of

MAN 1 Batam, Indonesia. While previous studies have often generalized findings to a broader audience, this research takes an in-depth look at linguistic, motivational, and environmental factors unique to this specific educational setting. It also emphasizes the role of extracurricular activities and institutional support, such as cultural engagement and professional development for teachers, which are often overlooked in general studies on Arabic language acquisition (Damayanti & Ammar, 2023).

Recognizing these challenges highlights the importance of exploring new pedagogical strategies that can enrich Arabic instruction. Innovative approaches, such as communicative language teaching, interactive learning environments, and multimedia resources, can create a more dynamic classroom experience. These methods have shown promise in various language learning settings by providing students with practical applications for the language, thus making learning more engaging and effective (Abdulhafid & Mustapha, 2024).

In addition to classroom strategies, extracurricular opportunities can play a vital role in language acquisition. Programs like language clubs, cultural events, and community engagement activities can help students practice Arabic in real-life contexts, reinforcing their skills and boosting their confidence. At MAN 1 Batam, the potential for these activities exists, but structured support and resources are needed to fully realize their benefits for students.

Overall, the complexities of Arabic language acquisition in a non-Arabic speaking country like Indonesia present both significant challenges and valuable opportunities for growth. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting 10th-grade students' experiences in Arabic learning at the Religious Program of MAN 1 Batam. By examining these dynamics, the study hopes to contribute to the development of more effective language teaching practices and to foster a supportive environment that maximizes students' potential in Arabic language acquisition.

Arabic Language Learning Challenges

The complexity of the Arabic language presents unique challenges for non-native speakers, particularly those in non-Arabic-speaking countries like Indonesia. Studies by (Khusniyah & Afifah, 2024) highlight that the Arabic script, complex grammar, and morphology can create barriers for beginners. These linguistic challenges necessitate specific instructional strategies, as students struggle to connect Arabic to their native language due to the lack of shared linguistic features.

Motivational Factors in Language Acquisition

Motivation is a critical factor influencing language acquisition, particularly for languages perceived as having limited practical application. Research by Gardner (1985) emphasizes that intrinsic motivation, or personal interest in a language, is key to achieving proficiency. In contexts like Indonesian madrasahs, students often view Arabic as an academic requirement rather than a functional skill, which can lead to low engagement (Fatimah & Wahid, 2022).

The Role of Pedagogical Approaches

Teaching strategies play an essential role in language acquisition success. Traditional grammar-based methods are widely used in religious schools, yet these approaches may not align with students' communicative needs. Khan (2020) suggests that a combination of communicative and interactive methods is more effective in helping students retain vocabulary and understand sentence structure, as they allow for more real-life practice and engagement.

Rote Memorization and Its Limitations

Rote memorization is common in Arabic language classrooms in Indonesia. While it is effective for religious text memorization, it may not support broader language comprehension or conversational ability (Siti & Rahman, 2021). Research shows that memorization without understanding context can limit students' ability to apply language skills practically, which is essential for fluency.

The Impact of Technology in Language Learning

Recent studies highlight the role of technology in enhancing language learning. Mahdi and Azmi (2023) show that digital tools, such as language learning apps and online Arabic tutorials, can provide interactive and accessible language practice outside the classroom. This is especially beneficial for students with limited exposure to Arabic in their daily lives, as technology bridges the gap between classroom instruction and independent practice (Damayanti & Ammar, 2023).

Classroom Environment and Language Acquisition

The classroom environment, including teacher-student interaction and peer support, influences students' language acquisition. Yusuf (2022) suggests that a supportive and interactive classroom environment encourages active participation and fosters confidence in using the language. At MAN 1 Batam, the implementation of group activities and peer-based learning could enhance students' comfort in practicing Arabic.

Extracurricular Activities as Learning Opportunities

Extracurricular programs such as language clubs or cultural immersion events can provide valuable exposure to Arabic. Qasim (2020) notes that immersive experiences are highly effective in reinforcing classroom learning by allowing students to practice language skills in real-life contexts. Integrating such programs in schools can enhance students' engagement and improve retention.

Institutional Support in Language Programs

Institutional support is critical in creating a conducive environment for language acquisition. Zain (2023) emphasizes the importance of resources such as qualified language instructors and accessible learning materials. In the case of MAN 1 Batam, enhanced institutional support through professional development for teachers and access to quality materials could improve teaching effectiveness.

Teacher Professional Development

Continuous professional development for teachers is necessary for effective language instruction. According to Ali and Hussein (2021), training in innovative pedagogical techniques, such as task-based and communicative approaches, equips teachers to handle diverse student needs. This can be especially relevant in MAN 1 Batam, where teachers might benefit from training focused on engaging students with different learning preferences.

Cultural Relevance in Language Pedagogy

Incorporating cultural elements in language teaching helps students connect with the language on a deeper level. Hassan and Ibrahim (2023) argue that culturally relevant materials improve student motivation by making the language feel more relatable. At MAN 1 Batam, integrating culturally relevant Arabic resources could provide students with a holistic understanding of the language beyond its religious importance.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the challenges and opportunities of Arabic language acquisition among 10th-grade students in the Religious Program at MAN 1 Batam. A case study design allows for an in-depth examination of students' experiences, perceptions, and interactions within their specific learning environment. This approach was chosen to capture the complexities of Arabic language learning, focusing on linguistic, motivational, and environmental factors that influence language acquisition outcomes. The participants in this study

included 15 students from the 10th grade, selected to represent a range of proficiency levels, along with 5 Arabic language teachers. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the sample included students who faced varying degrees of difficulty with the language. Teachers with different levels of experience and teaching methods were also included to provide diverse perspectives on instructional practices and the specific challenges students encounter. Data collection involved three primary methods: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers explored participants' views on the challenges and motivations associated with Arabic learning. Focus group discussions encouraged students to share their experiences and allowed for a collective understanding of common issues. Classroom observations provided insight into teacher-student interactions, teaching methods, and student engagement levels. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification of key themes related to challenges and opportunities in Arabic language acquisition. Data coding was conducted to categorize responses into themes such as linguistic challenges, motivational factors, and pedagogical strategies. This analytical approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the data, enabling the identification of common patterns and unique experiences that shaped the students' learning processes. Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal data. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The study was conducted with respect for participants' privacy and cultural context, ensuring that the research process was transparent and ethically sound.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and interpretations from data collected in the study. Results reveal various challenges and opportunities that influence Arabic language acquisition among 10th-grade students in the Religious Program at MAN 1 Batam. These insights include linguistic, motivational, and environmental factors that shape the learning experience. The results will be discussed in relation to pedagogical strategies, student motivation, and institutional support, with each factor playing a distinct role in students' overall progress.

Challenges in Grammar and Vocabulary Acquisition

The findings highlight that grammar and vocabulary acquisition are the two most significant challenges faced by students. Arabic grammar, with its complex rules and sentence structures, is particularly challenging for learners who are unfamiliar with these linguistic features. Students reported struggling to remember grammatical rules and apply them accurately in written and oral communication. Vocabulary is also a major obstacle, with students finding it difficult to retain and use new words, which are often unrelated to their daily language experiences.



Figure 1, Student Motivation and Engagement

Motivational issues were identified as a significant barrier to learning. Many students expressed a lack of intrinsic motivation to learn Arabic, as they perceived it to have limited application beyond religious studies. This lack of perceived utility results in lower engagement, with students often viewing Arabic classes as an academic requirement rather than a useful skill. Without a personal connection to the language, students are less inclined to invest time and effort in mastering it.

Pedagogical Approaches and Student Preferences

Teachers primarily used traditional methods like grammar translation and rote memorization, which did not align well with students' learning preferences. These methods, while

helpful for exam preparation, were less effective for practical language use. Students indicated that the heavy focus on memorization made learning repetitive and disengaging. There is a clear need for teaching methods that emphasize interactive and communicative activities to foster greater interest and understanding.

Classroom Environment and Student Interaction

Classroom dynamics were another influential factor, with limited opportunities for students to practice Arabic in a communicative setting. Observations revealed that the classroom environment was often teacher-centered, with minimal student participation or interaction. This environment reduced students' chances to engage in meaningful conversations, which are essential for language acquisition. An interactive setting, where students can practice speaking and listening, could significantly enhance their learning experience.



Figure 2. Institutional Support and Resource Accessibility

Institutional support, including access to learning resources, emerged as a crucial factor in students' language acquisition. Currently, limited resources such as Arabic language materials, multimedia tools, and language labs restrict students' exposure to Arabic. Students and teachers expressed the need for a greater variety of resources to make learning more accessible and

engaging. Institutional investment in resources would likely enhance students' language practice opportunities outside the classroom.

Role of Extracurricular Activities in Language Acquisition

Extracurricular activities were found to offer valuable opportunities for language exposure, particularly through programs like language clubs and community interactions. These activities allow students to practice Arabic in real-life contexts, thereby strengthening their linguistic skills. Teachers noted that students who participated in these activities showed increased confidence and language proficiency, suggesting that extracurricular engagement plays a crucial role in reinforcing classroom learning.



Figure 3. Teacher Professional Development Needs

The study identified a need for continuous professional development for Arabic language teachers. Teachers acknowledged that while they were committed to student learning, many lacked training in modern pedagogical techniques. Professional development programs focusing on innovative, communicative teaching methods could help teachers create more engaging and effective learning environments. Empowering teachers with these skills would enable them to better meet the diverse learning needs of students.

Technological Integration in Language Learning

Integrating technology into the classroom was noted as an opportunity to improve student engagement and resource accessibility. Tools like language learning apps, online resources, and multimedia aids can make Arabic learning more interactive and relatable. Students expressed interest in using technology as a supplement to traditional instruction, indicating that digital resources would increase their motivation and language practice outside the classroom.

Impact of Cultural Relevance on Learning Motivation

The study revealed that culturally relevant content significantly influences students' motivation. Lessons that connected Arabic to Indonesian culture or other familiar aspects of students' lives tended to engage students more deeply. By integrating cultural elements into the curriculum, teachers can make Arabic feel more relevant and accessible, which would likely enhance students' commitment to learning.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities associated with Arabic language acquisition among 10th-grade students at the Religious Program of MAN 1 Batam. Key findings indicate that students face significant challenges in mastering complex grammar and expanding their Arabic vocabulary, coupled with motivational obstacles and limited access to Arabic language resources outside the classroom. However, despite these barriers, there are effective strategies and institutional support systems that can foster improvement in Arabic language learning.

The research highlights that pedagogical strategies play a critical role in enhancing student engagement. Interactive learning methods, culturally relevant teaching materials, and practical applications of Arabic can significantly improve the learning experience and make Arabic more relatable for students. Moreover, extracurricular activities and community involvement have shown to be instrumental in providing students with practical language exposure, enabling them to develop their language skills beyond the academic setting.

In conclusion, although there are considerable challenges in Arabic language acquisition, the recommendations provided—such as adapting interactive teaching methods, increasing access to learning resources, fostering teacher development, and promoting language immersion activities—present promising pathways to enhance student outcomes. By implementing these

strategies, MAN 1 Batam and similar institutions can improve students' proficiency and foster a positive, motivating environment for Arabic language learning.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to improve Arabic language acquisition among 10th-grade students in the Religious Program at MAN 1 Batam. First, the curriculum should be adapted to include more interactive and communicative activities that encourage students to actively use Arabic in meaningful contexts. Role-playing, group discussions, and language games can enhance engagement by making lessons more dynamic. By focusing on practical application, students are more likely to retain grammatical rules and vocabulary.

Second, expanding access to language resources is essential to support learning beyond the classroom. Providing students with multimedia tools, such as Arabic language apps, audio-visual materials, and online resources, would give them opportunities to practice independently. Language labs equipped with interactive learning software can facilitate listening and speaking exercises that build conversational skills. In this way, students gain additional exposure to Arabic, which can improve their language proficiency.

A third recommendation is to incorporate culturally relevant content into lessons. Teaching Arabic through cultural contexts, such as connecting Arabic terms to Indonesian heritage or introducing Arab customs, can make the language more relatable and meaningful for students. This approach not only fosters student interest but also helps them view Arabic as a living language with relevance beyond religious studies. Culturally enriched lessons could enhance students' motivation to engage more deeply with the language.

Investing in ongoing professional development for teachers is also crucial. Teachers should receive training in modern, communicative teaching methods to align with current best practices in language education. Workshops and seminars focusing on strategies for interactive language teaching can equip teachers with tools to better address student needs. Through professional development, teachers can create more engaging and effective learning environments that support diverse learning preferences.

Finally, encouraging extracurricular activities, such as language clubs or cultural exchange programs, can significantly boost students' language acquisition. These activities provide valuable practice opportunities in real-life contexts, building students' confidence in their Arabic skills.

MAN 1 Batam could collaborate with other institutions or cultural organizations to provide more language immersion experiences. This exposure to practical language use outside of the classroom would reinforce formal instruction and contribute to students' overall language development.

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