

# A STUDY OF ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING CHALLENGES AMONG STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the challenges of learning Arabic as a third language for students at higher education institution. The study identified three main issues that affect learning outcomes: language challenges, motivation barriers and support level. The phonological, grammatical, and sociocultural complexity of the Arabic language poses major obstacles. This is especially true for students who have limited access to specific aspects of the language. The same is true for motivational factors. Where students' perceptions of the relevance of the Arabic language influence their participation, limited educational support also exacerbates these problems. The research used a quantitative method using surveys to measure students' perceptions and experiences with these challenges. The results suggest that although phonological and grammatical problems significantly impact performance, motivational support and tailored teaching methods can alleviate some of these barriers. The study highlights the potential of technology-based learning and interactive learning approaches, such as task-based communication methods, to improve Arabic language learning outcomes at higher education institution. The research suggests that these strategies can be integrated with Arabic language courses to increase participation and reduce barriers to language learning.*

**Keywords:** Academic Discipline, Arabic Language Learning, Grammar Proficiency, Language Motivation, Teaching Methods

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Within the last few years, the necessity of Arabic language courses in Malaysian universities has been defined, and some of them, have included Arabic courses in their programs. Arabic is important culturally, religiously, and professionally as it is relevant to learners' daily lives, educational institutions, and working lives in Malaysia, where the language is crucial, especially for reading and understanding Islamic texts, international business, and diplomacy with Arab countries. Despite its relevance, students at higher education institution and across many other educational institutions encounter considerable challenges when learning Arabic. Many of these hurdles arise from some peculiarities of the Arabic language and different motivation and support-related factors influencing students' academic achievement (Mohd et al., 2019).

Arabic is scientifically known as being a phonologically and scripturally opposed language to most other languages in the world, especially those of the alphabetic writing system. Arabic writing is from right to left while English is from left to right, making Arabic challenging for learners. Moreover, the phonetic structure of Arabic is nonstandard and consists of some sounds that are not recognizable by learners of Arabic as other languages do not possess these sounds. This situation requires separate approaches when it is a question of learning Arabic: different students will require different methods.

In addition to the language issues, motivational aspects are also paramount in obtaining the fluency with which students learn Arabic. The amount of motivation is a function of perceived relevance to their programs of study, career aspirations, and class instructional techniques. Arabic in particular may pose some problems for some students because they may not experience the pragmatic value of learning the language or may have little cultural connection to it at first glance (Ibrahim et al., 2018).

Lastly, motivations that they receive, or otherwise, play a role in defining what a learner will be able to do in learning Arabic. This includes not only qualified and experienced instructors but the support from the institution in the form of equipment and additional relevant material. To overcome the barriers that are hindered by the language effective teaching approaches and academic and emotional support should be provided to the student (Ritonga et al., 2021).

This study adopts Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as its conceptual framework. These frameworks focus on using language in real-life tasks and communication to improve language proficiency. They are particularly relevant for Arabic, given the language's complexities and the challenges non-native speakers faced. By incorporating practical, task-based methods and communication-focused teaching, this study aims to explore how these factors—language, motivation, and support—interact to influence students' performance, engagement, and interest in learning Arabic. Through this research, we aim to shed light on these interconnected factors and provide practical recommendations for educators and administrators to enhance Arabic teaching and learning in higher education.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

About 400 million people use the Arabic language in 22 different countries and it takes the fifth position among the most commonly spoken language at the global level. It occupies the fourth or post-fourth position in terms of internet usage and is rather significant in international communication which might include business, diplomacy, and religious studies among others. Consequently, there has been a sharp rise in Arabic being learned as a third language not only in Western countries but also in schools all over the world. In certificate and Diploma programs which students pursue at various colleges and universities, Arabic is particularly important. According to Moghazy (2021), nonetheless, even though Arabic has become more important in the global arena, the process of learning this language has several difficulties for the students among which are discussed below: Firstly, those students who do not share a close relationship with the Arabic language faced challenges in learning the Arabic language as most of the students of the higher education institution.

Nonetheless, although the Arabic language is regarded as a useful language worldwide, it is still difficult for non-Arabic learners including those in Malaysia where the Arabic language is not commonly in practice. The three main challenges are the linguistic features of Arabic (the students at higher education institution face double the challenge because Arabic is different and has extra features that Malay does not have), motivational barriers, and level of support for learners. This section aims to review the pertinent literature relating to the

difficulties that students experience while learning Arabic and the challenges facing learners in higher education institution. This paper also outlines the pedagogy theories and approaches that have been discovered to assist in the elimination of these challenges together with the contribution of technology in the learning process stated by Ismail et al. (2021).

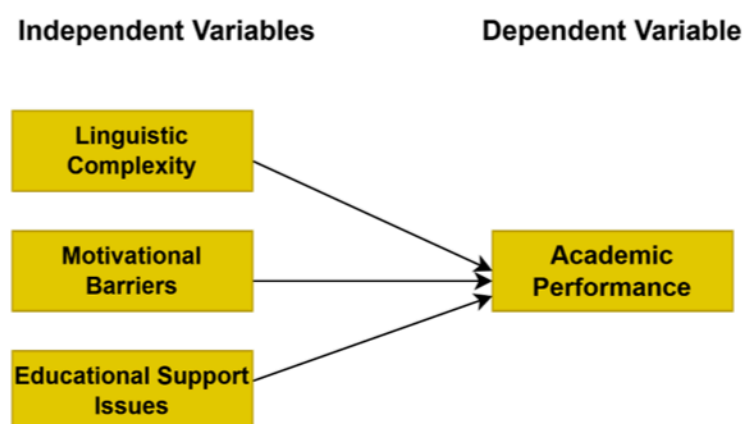
## 2.1 Relevant Theories and Models

This study employs Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the theoretical framework to solve the challenges facing the teaching and learning of the Arabic language. As both frameworks are intended to encourage the use of real-life language and contexts together with communicative acts, both are suitable for Arabic instruction.

Task-Achievement-Interaction-Option (TAIO) or Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) aimed at task, whereby the students shall perform tasks that require the use of the language to get the intended results. Such tasks are helpful for participation in communicative processes, for example, problem-solving or juggling roles; thus, they promote both speaking and listening comprehensible input and output. In Arabic, TBLT also assigns students with tasks that resemble ordinary communication exercises so that the student can use their language in a typical day setting.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to foreign language learning and teaching that focuses on meaning in context rather than correct grammar. This makes the students to be able to argue, discuss, and sometimes even negotiate with the help of the language being used to pass a specific message. In the Arab World, CLT involves interactional patterns that concern the effective and correct use of the target language as a means of communication between the learner and the teacher and between learners, closing the gap between linguistic theory and practice.

TBLT and CLT have an underlying focus of motivation that their integration would effectively work for both contexts. These frameworks stress more the uniqueness of the learner with the increased enrolment level or participation of students ensuring their engagement with the language they meet in and out of classrooms they use daily. Motivation leads to participation which in turn increases absorption, comprehension, and retention of language and academics.



This framework is selected due to the fact that not only pragmatics will be dealt with in a general way but also because it responds to the goals of this study: to focus on Arabic as a language and contribute to the effective use of language in communication. Being based on natural communication and task accomplishment the motivation and success achieved in learning Arabic with the help of TBLT and CLT is much higher. The two models are especially

useful for Arabic, because of its language's specific features and difficulties that non-Arab learners may meet stated by Hosseini (2019).

## **2.2 Communication Challenges for Individuals with Non-Native Language Backgrounds**

The challenges observed by Almelhes (2024) in analysing Arabic include phonological, grammatical and sociolinguistic that make learning of this language tough especially for students undertaking higher education learning and or those learning the language as third language. Arabic Phonology is problematic because some of the sounds are new here like 'Ayn' (ع) and 'Qaf' (ق). These sounds are produced in precise manner and present a lot of demands on the acoustic phonetics, which makes academic reading and communication difficult for students who rarely interact with Arabic speaking individuals. Huneetya et al. (2024) have pointed out that phonological challenges lead to frustration, reduced self-esteem, which all affect motivation.

Arabic grammar is complex because the structure of the language derives its vocabulary from triliteral consonant bases. However, it has no fixed word order and a very rich verb conjugation which makes word order and verb tense and other structures becoming practically burdensome for memory as pointed out by Betti et al. (2023). Arabic is spoken in different ways, including Egyptian, Gulf, North African, and others and in terms of speech, politeness, and statues. Such sociolinguistic factor pose difficulties to students particularly those who seldom encounter the Arab cultures (Ambu Saidi, 2020).

## **2.3 Teaching Methods**

While teaching arabic the approaches that should be used include Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that enhance real life communicative language. TBLT framework makes students perform tasks actively, while in CLT what is important is the language used rather than correctness. An app like Duolingo and Rosetta Stone can also help with learning as the students can practice outside the classroom. Procedures help to create an effective motivating learning environment thus enhancing the fluency and student achievements (Bayousef, 2019).

## **2.4 Technological Interventions**

Technology is very relevant in imparting Arabic language learning, especially in the learning levels of higher learning institutions. Transforming learning in classroom, Duolingo, Babbel and Rosetta Stone employs both speaking, listening and writing that students can practice with in their own time. These tools are game-based tools, which help to increase effectiveness of learning by motivation. Furthermore, students may get in touch with Arabic media to widen their understanding culturally and linguistically. Although there are difficulties with phonological, grammatical and sociocultural aspects of Arabic using engagement strategies such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and informative technologies help address learning barriers and enhance students' learning experiences.

## **3.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this research are:

1. To determine the major difficulties experienced by higher education students when acquiring the Arabic language.

2. To identify the causes of these difficulties, focusing on linguistic concerns, motivation, and educational support.
3. To examine how these challenges impact students' behaviors, including their academic performance and passion for learning Arabic.
4. To propose suggestions for overcoming the identified difficulties in connection with Arabic language learning at universities.

#### **4.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major difficulties experienced by higher education students when acquiring the Arabic language?
2. What are the causes of these difficulties, focusing on linguistic concerns, motivation, and educational support?
3. How do these challenges affect students' behaviors, including their academic performance and passion for learning Arabic?
4. What are the possible solutions to overcome the difficulties in Arabic language learning at universities?

#### **5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research was designed using a quantitative exploratory research design where surveys were used to collect data from students' perceptions of Arabic language learning in UiTM Cawangan Johor. 50 students from Arabic language classes were chosen through purposive sampling, and all the participants had prior exposure to the language. The data were collected in the form of a structured questionnaire that covered four main aspects: linguistic problem, motivation, educational facilitation and academic achievement in Arabic.

The following scales were used to measure these aspects based on the five-point Likert scale, hence making the study quantitative in nature. The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms so that the participants could easily access it, and their identities remained anonymous. They completed the survey at their own time within the two weeks period. This method of data collection also made data collection simple and effective. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software, where descriptive statistics were used to identify patterns and trends of the variables of interest, while regression analysis was conducted to establish the relationships between the variables.

The analysis helped to determine how linguistic problems, motivational problems, academic support, and self-perceived achievement affected the students' experience in learning Arabic. The outcomes of the study helped to identify the factors that influenced students' experience and achievement in Arabic language learning. Additionally, these findings provided recommendations to enhance the efficiency of teaching and learning the Arabic language in higher learning institution to improve language learning.

#### **6.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This dataset provides a comprehensive overview of the participant profiles. It includes important demographic variables such as gender, age, experience, academic discipline, etc. This information is important to know the background of the respondents. And how might it affect your effectiveness in learning Arabic? By checking these variables we can explore factors that may affect language learning. Including previous knowledge Learning preferences related to age and academic participants coming from this preliminary framework helps set the stage for further analysis and interpretation of the study results used in the study (Valverde-Berrocso et al., 2020).



A brief description of the participants' profiles is given in the dataset; the particulars include gender, age, experience, and academic discipline. Also, as for the gender criterion, the distribution of the respondents is almost equal – 50% males and 50% females – that means gender has no effect and results will not be gender predisposed. The grouping into age is relatively equal: 38% of students are in one of the groups, 32% in the second, and 30% in the third. This implies that age does not play a very strong role in learning Arabic within this sample although more research may unveil learning preferences by age.

We took the experience as a candidate generator, with nearly half of the participants having little to medium experience, at 34% and 36% respectively, while the remaining 25% had much better experience. This implies a generally poor background hence such students may find it difficult to learn Arabic more so in Desenvolvimento, grammar as well as vocabulary. Finally, the distribution of the field of study is diverse, of all the students, most students come from Field 1 and Field 2. This suggests a generally enhanced interest in learning Arabic, perhaps extending beyond simple language learning, and thus calls for teaching methodologies that accommodate the kind of diversity of background that this survey has revealed.

Table 1. Participants' Profile Overview

Statistics		Gender	Age	Experience	Field
N	Valid	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.500	1.920	2.340	2.680
Median		1.500	2.000	3.000	2.000
Mode		1.0 <sup>a</sup>	1.0	3.0	2.0

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

The regression analysis suggests that experience as to Arabic causes an impact on grammar, which was one of the major predictors of the exam result. The paper also found that students with more experience have fewer problems in mastering Arabic grammar or, in other words, have a better academic outcome. The result of this study affirms the hypothesis that a prior learning environment in the language can assist students in expunging the barriers to foreign language comprehension. The results of the correlation analysis help to determine numerous relations in the connection between examination results, difficulties with grammar, learners' lack of motivation, and teachers' support. Significantly poor grammar brings about poor performance in the exams as there is a very high negative coefficient ( - 0.548) between the performance in exams and the level of grammar. Instead, the correlation between the scores and low motivation is meager (+0.199) pointing at a potential connection, though there are likely more significant influences at work. This study shows that student difficulties in grammar are positively related (0.357) to the type of classroom lecturer support they receive, although the impact of lecturer support on students' grammatical abilities is quite questionable. Grammar difficulty correlates weakly with motivation toward the content, meaning that motivation depends not on grammar but on something else. In this study, lecturer support is also significantly but weakly negatively related to exam performance (-0.189) suggesting that while extra support can be helpful the means to it must also have certain helpful effects on exam and assignment engagement and the kind of support that is helpful (Eltahir et al., 2021).

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Variables

Correlations		ExamPerformance	GrammarDifficulty	LackofMotivation
ExamPerformance	Pearson Correlation	1	-.548**	.199
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.165
	N	50	50	50
GrammarDifficulty	Pearson Correlation	-.548**	1	-.100
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.489
	N	50	50	50
LackofMotivation	Pearson Correlation	.199	-.100	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.165	.489	
	N	50	50	50
TeacherSupport	Pearson Correlation	-.189	.357*	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.189	.011	.632
	N	50	50	50

The ANOVA results show that the F-statistic is 1.643, with a corresponding p-value of 0.192. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in exam performance between the groups based on the predictors (Lecturer support, Lack of Motivation, and Grammar Difficulty). Specifically, the p-value is greater than the common significance level of 0.05, meaning we fail to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that the model's factors do not significantly impact exam performance. The Between Groups sum of squares (2.921) reflects the variation explained by the predictors, while the Within Groups sum of squares (27.259) represents the variation within the individual groups.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Exam Performance

ANOVA					
ExamPerformance					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.921	3	.974	1.643	.192
Within Groups	27.259	46	.593		
Total	30.180	49			

The results of the independent sample t-test showed a relationship between the two groups and test performance. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated a significant difference in variance between groups, with an F value of 6.526 and a p-value of 0.014, indicating unequal variances when equal variances are considered. Together, the t-value was 1.269 with a p-value of 0.210, which was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, i.e. indicating no significant difference in test performance between the two groups. When unequal variances were assumed, the t-value was still 1.269 with a p-value of 0.212, which still did not show a significant difference. The average difference was 0.2800, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from -0.1636 to 0.7236, further indicating no significant difference in test performance between the groups.

Table 4. Independent Samples t-Test for Exam Performance

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ExamPerformance	Equal variances assumed	6.526	.014	1.269	48	.210	.2800	.2206	-.1636	.7236
	Equal variances not assumed			1.269	40.182	.212	.2800	.2206	-.1658	.7258

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

This research sheds light on the key issues that students deal with when studying Arabic at tertiary level institutions in particular the detrimental effect of grammar on academic achievements particularly during exams. Secondly, the Arabic language structure is quite complicated and this greatly hampers effective learning by the students and as a result the students have low achievement levels. This study emphasizes the need for targeted measures or approaches to cope with the grammar related challenges.

While lecturer support does alleviate some of the challenges, its effect on performance in the examination in a tangible form is minimal. This indicates that other measures, such as the ones related to grammar restructuring together with the incorporation of more interactive learning, are necessary to gain the desired results. The study also shows that gender as well as the previous knowledge of Arabic are of no relevance with regard to academic achievement which indicates that the challenges are related more to the complexities of the language than demographic aspects. In addition, the weak correlation between motivation and performance serves to highlight the importance of grammar as a determining factor. These hurdles need to be resolved to enhance student performance in the study of Arabic language and literature.

## 8.0 SUGGESTIONS

It has been apparent that the evolution of Arabic language technology applications greatly simplifies the learning of Arabic grammar (Ortikov, 2024). Teaching activities should enable students to understand the essential parts by giving clarification of important rules and formulate complex ideas into simpler ones. At the same time, active exercises such as sentence making, acting out situations, and solving problems co-operatively make the subject more interesting and easy to understand (Godwin-Jones, 2019).

Personalized learning strategies help cope with particular difficulties students faced. The institutions may also consider giving grammar oriented classes and personalized tutoring sessions to students who find the language too intricate. Peer mentoring programs promote working together as well as help in the understanding of complicated issues (Hoang, 2021). Grammar pedagogy and learner engagement are enhanced through teacher training workshops and advanced tools. Moreover, online exercises and digital tools can be used in addition to the face to face methods to provide practice at the student's own pace and reinforce grammar knowledge. This curricula result to key topics including basic grammar and writing systems as well as the combination of theoretical and practical aspects meant to enhance the language abilities of the students for effective usage if real situations arise.

Future studies should examine the effectiveness of specific teaching methods and technological interventions in reducing language barriers. In addition, examining the long-term



effects on academic performance and motivation would provide valuable insights into improving your Arabic language learning. The study also found that gender and previous exposure to Arabic had no significant impact on students' academic performance. This supports the conclusion that the main challenges are rooted in the specifics of the Arabic language rather than demographic factors. Moreover, the weak relationship between motivation and academic performance suggests that language complexity especially grammar is a strong factor in determining success in learning Arabic.

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