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CHALLENGES FACED BY NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS IN LEARNING ARABIC SYNTAX IN DIPLOMA COURSE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the specific challenges faced by non-native speakers enrolled in diploma-level Arabic language courses, with a focus on syntax (*nahu*). The research highlights recurrent challenges such as identifying verb forms (*māḍī*, *muḍāriʿ*), mastering sentence structures, using grammatical rules, and memorizing morphological patterns (*tasrīf*) based on qualitative data gathered through open-ended survey responses. Many students stated that their difficulties were rooted in a lack of early exposure to Arabic, limited vocabulary, and fast-paced teaching methods that assumed prior knowledge. Despite these challenges, students expressed strong motivation to improve, driven by their desire to understand the Qur'an, pursue religious knowledge, and succeed academically. The findings suggest that more scaffolded and learner-friendly teaching strategies are needed, including simplified explanations, practical exercises, and supportive learning environments. This study provides valuable insight into how to enhance diploma-level Arabic syntax instruction to promote student achievement, especially for those without a fundamental background.

Keywords: *Arabic syntax, non-native speakers, diploma students, language learning challenges, educational research, pedagogical strategies*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews existing studies related to the learning of Arabic syntax by non-native speakers. It begins by exploring the importance of syntax in learning Arabic, followed by challenges faced non-native students, and the context of Arabic Syntax instruction in higher education.

Understanding Arabic grammar, or *nahw*, is essential to being fluent in the language. However, because of disparities in language backgrounds, teaching philosophies, and inadequate fundamental experience, non-native learners frequently find it difficult to understand syntactic norms, particularly at the certificate level. Fewer studies have explicitly examined the syntactic obstacles faced by diploma-level

students in non-Arabic-speaking nations like Malaysia, despite the fact that several have addressed general difficulties in learning Arabic.

By investigating the actual experiences of diploma students learning Arabic as a second or foreign language, this study aims to close that gap. The study intends to provide pertinent pedagogical solutions to improve learning results in Arabic syntax by identifying prevalent impediments and student views. Although the general problems with learning Arabic have been covered in a number of studies (e.g., Al-Batal, 1992; Mahmoud, 2018; Nor Hasliza & Mohd Nazri, 2020), little is known about the syntactic difficulties that diploma students face.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, using purposive sampling to explore the syntactic learning challenges among 17 non-native diploma students, with data collected through an Arabic grammar test and an online open-ended questionnaire to enable methodological triangulation.

Research Instruments

Two research instruments were developed for this study:

- **Open-ended Questionnaire**

A structured open-ended questionnaire was designed to explore students' personal experiences and challenges in learning Arabic grammar (syntax). The questionnaire consists of three sections: Section A: Personal Information (e.g., academic background, language exposure) and Section B: Learning Experience (e.g., difficult grammar topics, effective methods). While, Section C: Personal Reflection (e.g., motivation and self-confidence). This format allowed participants to express their thoughts freely, providing rich qualitative data.

- **Arabic Grammar Test**

A short Arabic grammar test was created to assess participants' basic understanding of Arabic syntax. The test focused on common grammatical structures such as verb forms (*fi'l māḍī, muḍāri*), sentence construction, and morphological patterns (*tasrīf*). The test helped triangulate data from the questionnaire and identify common areas of difficulty.

RESULT



Figure 1 shows the main challenges in learning Arabic syntax faced by non - native speakers. Among the highest challenges faced were, the students confuse to identify the Present tense (Mudari') and Past Tense (Madi). The students also have trouble to construct sentences and memorizing the tasrif.

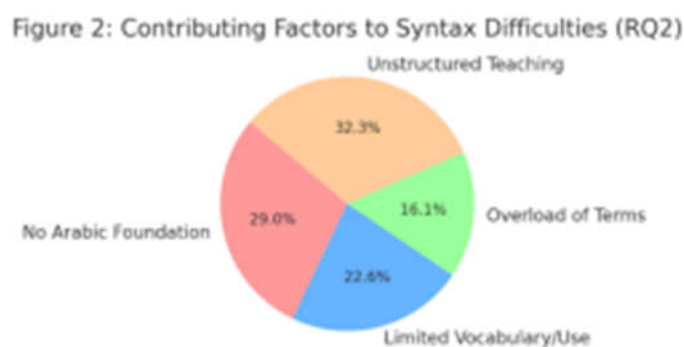


Figure 2 presents the factors that contribute to syntax difficulties. Unstructured Teaching contributes the highest factor in syntax difficulties, followed by no arabic foundation 29% and limited vocabulary and usage 22.6%. While, overload of terms shows 16.1%.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, several key issues can be highlighted regarding the challenges faced by non-native diploma students in learning Arabic syntax:

1. Having trouble distinguishing between the verb forms *muḍāri‘* and *māḍī*

When it came to identifying and using the appropriate verb tense in sentences, most students displayed uncertainty. Verb conjugation is one of the more difficult parts of learning Arabic for second language learners, and this reflects a recognized problem in the language (Al-Batal, 2017; Mahmoud, 2018).

2. Insufficient early Arabic exposure

More difficulties were observed by students who had little to no prior knowledge of Arabic grammar before beginning their diploma courses. This result confirms earlier findings that early and regular language exposure has a major impact on syntactic development (Ibrahim & Al-Tamimi, 2021).

3. Instruction that is too technical or moves quickly impairs understanding.

Students become overwhelmed and disinterested when grammar courses are hurried or overflowing with new vocabulary. Studies on effective Arabic pedagogy for non-native learners have also shown that clear and scaffolded explanations are essential (Nor Hasliza & Mohd Nazri, 2020; Al-Batal, 2017).

4. Preference for methodical training that includes practice and examples

Participants made it apparent that they preferred instruction that included methodical, incremental explanations backed up with real-world examples of sentences and exercises. According to Richards (2006), guided practice improves grammatical retention, which is consistent with constructivist learning ideas.

5. The value of a cooperative learning environment and peer cooperation

Peer support, careful instruction, and fostering classroom relationships were all thought to be beneficial for improving motivation and comprehension. This demonstrates how social and emotional elements play a part in learning a second language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This study has shed important light on the difficulties non-native diploma students encounter when learning Arabic syntax. The results show that a lot of students have trouble with basic grammar skills including morphological memorization, sentence formation, and verb identification (*māḍī* and *muḍāri‘*). Lack of early exposure, a small vocabulary, and fast-paced or extremely technical teaching techniques are all strongly associated with these challenges.

Students show a tremendous willingness to learn Arabic in spite of these challenges, motivated by academic, personal, and spiritual reasons. Thus, more scaffolded, learner-friendly teaching methods are obviously needed. Step-by-step instructions, real-world examples, and the creation of encouraging classroom conditions that promote active involvement should be the top priorities for teachers.

Arabic syntax instruction can be greatly enhanced by matching teaching strategies to students' needs. This will increase learner engagement and success, particularly for students who have no prior Arabic knowledge.

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