

Student's Learning Readiness for Communication Arabic Subject in Higher Education System

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ABSTRACT

Learning readiness is the prerequisite condition for the effective learning process among learners. Understanding the factors influencing students' readiness to learn a language is crucial for educators and institutions aiming to facilitate effective language acquisition. The interplay of interest, motivation, and prior knowledge significantly shapes the receptivity of learners to the language learning process. This study aims to assess student's learning readiness in these key dimensions (interest, motivation, and prior knowledge) towards the specific context of Arabic Language for Communication at UiTM Cawangan Johor. By examining these factors, educators can gain valuable insights that inform tailored instructional strategies, ultimately enhancing the overall language learning experience for students. This study employs quantitative research whereby the data was collected from 116 part one students using an online questionnaire. The raw data was analyzed by using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to get the frequency, percentage mean and interpretation of the data. The positive results indicate that students are moderately prepared in terms of interest and motivation to learn the Arabic Communication subject. The result also shows that the students are ready in terms of Arabic language prior knowledge towards the learning. It is hoped that this research can be used as guidance for Arabic educators, especially the UiTM Arabic lecturers, to design the best and appropriate teaching approaches and methods, especially based on the students' existing knowledge, while seeking to optimize their teaching methodologies.

Keywords: Arabic learning, Interest, Motivation, Prior Knowledge

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Arabic language in Malaya was intrinsically linked to the dissemination of Islam, as it functioned as a pivotal instrument for comprehending Islamic teachings. The 13th century witnessed the substantial impact of Islamic influence on the sustenance of Arabic language instruction and acquisition in Malaya. Consequently, the Islamic community in Malaya was compelled to engage in the study and mastery of this language. It is noteworthy that Arabic, despite its initial utilization primarily in trade (Samah, 2009), assumes an elevated status as it serves as the language of the Quran and Hadith, constituting the primary reference for Muslims (Abdin, 2019).

Language, as a dynamic entity, possesses the inherent capacity to evolve and transform over time (Al-Yasu'iy, 1986). In this context, the enduring presence of the Sanskrit language in Malaya gradually receded, yielding precedence to the preservation and pedagogy of the Arabic language (Hassan, 2002). The early 19th century heralded the advent of the 'pondok' system (Abu Bakar, 1984). This pedagogical paradigm proffered religious education grounded in religious texts authored by Islamic scholars, encompassing the obligatory inclusion of Arabic language instruction, including aspects of grammar and morphology. This traditional system endures, prominently represented in establishments such as Pondok Pasir Tumbuh and Pondok Tok Kenali. However, the Japanese occupation of Malaya in the mid-20th century precipitated transformative alterations within the realm of Arabic language education (Yusuf, 2000).

Abdin's research (2019) reveals that with the institutionalization of the educational system, state religious schools emerged to ensure the continuity of Arabic language education across all states. The Madrasah *Marta lil Ulum al Diniah*, situated in the regal precinct of Klang, Selangor, was the pioneer state religious institution. The period from 1946 to 1960 witnessed multifarious amendments to the methodologies employed in teaching Arabic in these schools. Initially, two distinct streams of state religious schools were instituted by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS). The first stream employed Arabic texts and Arabic as the medium of instruction for religious subjects, while the second stream, referred to as the 'special class', employed Jawi script and Malay as the medium of instruction for religious subjects. As elucidated in the study conducted by Ariffin and Nordin (2022), the Integrated Early Curriculum (KBD) was accorded national recognition in 2012 and incrementally implemented from Form One to Form Five in State Religious Schools. KBD introduced religious subjects delivered through Arabic references and teaching materials.

Moreover, government-administered schools have incorporated Arabic language courses into their curricula. The establishment of Religious National Secondary Schools (SMKA) stemmed from the adaptation of the concept of state religious secondary schools, under the guidance of the late Tuan Haji Nik Mohammed Mohyideen bin Haji Wan Musa, Director of the Religious Affairs Division within the Ministry of Education. Initially comprising 11 schools, SMKA expanded to encompass 55 schools, with the overarching goal of fostering mainstream students' engagement with Arabic language learning. However, many students encountered impediments in pursuing their education at SMKA and thus opted for conventional daily schools. Consequently, the introduction of the Arabic Language Stream (KAA) was instituted as an initiative to cater to the proclivities of daily school students interested in Arabic language acquisition. The primary objective underlying the establishment of SMKA and KAA was to equitably facilitate mainstream students in advancing their Arabic language proficiency, particularly in the domains of Arabic language, Islamic studies, and allied fields.

The commendable endeavors of the Malaysian government in promoting and institutionalizing Arabic language instruction and acquisition merit due recognition. As

documented in the research by Muhammad (2013) and Abdin (2019), the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah bin Ahmad Badawi, ardently aspired to impart Arabic language education across diverse age groups, culminating in the launch of a distinctive program characterized by four primary focal areas. This program, christened 'j-QAF', was meticulously designed for the lower educational tiers, commencing from primary school, and was systematically integrated into national schools under the auspices of central government oversight. The four salient focal points encompassed the teaching and exposure to Jawi script, the Quran, foundational Arabic language proficiency, and the fundamental tenets of Fardhu Ain (basic Islamic obligations). Significantly, these initiatives were consolidated within the ambit of the Education Development Master Plan (KPM 2006).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Arabic Language Teaching and Learning at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)

The Integrated Early Curriculum (KBD), anchored in the Arabic language, has emerged as a pivotal catalyst in enabling students to pursue higher education in the realms of religious studies and Arabic language (Ariffin & Nordin, 2022). Consequently, this has led to the expansion in the establishment and provision of Arabic language education at the university level, offering it as a primary, secondary, or tertiary language of instruction.

Abdin's research (2019) underscores the origins of Arabic language teaching and learning at the university level, with its inception dating back to 1949 when the University of Malaya (UM) was initially situated in Singapore. The impetus behind this development was significantly reinforced with the introduction of the New Economic Policy, as Malaysia set its sights on enhancing its skilled workforce. In a span of two years, three additional public universities were founded: Universiti Sains Malaysia (1969), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (1970), and Universiti Putra Malaysia (1971). Arabic language education subsequently evolved within the purview of the faculties of education and foreign languages, becoming available as a core or elective course, often serving as the third language of instruction.

Sopian and Ahmad's investigation (2012) elucidates the substantial role played by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), the largest university in Malaysia, in advancing Arabic language education at the tertiary level. UiTM has not only incorporated Arabic language as a mandatory course, placing it on par with other foreign languages, but has also structured its intake according to academic levels. Degree-seeking students are provided the option to select Arabic language as their third language for a duration of three semesters. However, for diploma students at UiTM, Arabic language is offered as a third language in only two specific study fields: Business Diploma and Tourism Diploma.

On August 15, 2016, a significant milestone was reached with the formal introduction of the Professional Communication Arabic Language Bachelor's Degree Program at the Language Academy of UiTM Shah Alam, characterized by a three-year curriculum. This program underscores multifarious facets, including language proficiency, applied linguistics, professional communication, information technology, cultural studies, entrepreneurship, and management, all converging to provide a comprehensive and structured educational framework (Programme Information LG242).

2.2 Learning Readiness

Learning readiness refers to an individual's preparedness or capacity to acquire new knowledge, skills, or information effectively. It encompasses a range of psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors that can influence a person's ability to learn and adapt to new information or experiences. Factors that contribute to learning readiness can generally be categorized into internal and external factors.

Some of the internal factors are learner's motivation, prior knowledge, cognitive abilities, and emotional state. While the external factors are learning environment, social and cultural factors, and many more. It is important to recognize that these two factors are often interconnected. For example, a supportive external learning environment can positively influence a student's internal motivation to learn. Likewise, internal factors, like personal traits, can influence how an individual perceives and interacts with external factors.

Learning readiness can have a significant influence on a student's achievement since a student's readiness to learn sets the stage for effective learning experiences. According to Ciudad and Aliazas (2022), learning readiness can increase the educational achievement of students, and the efficiency and effectiveness of classroom teaching. The absence of student readiness in learning leads to decrease the educational achievement of the student. It also decreases the efficiency and effectiveness of classroom teaching and wastes huge government investment in school education (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019).

2.3 Interest

Interest refers to a person's curiosity, attraction, or fascination with a particular topic, subject, or activity. It is a psychological and emotional state that drives individuals to explore, learn, or engage with something that captures their attention and enthusiasm and then can significantly influence one's choices. Interest is a complex concept that can be influenced by both nature (inherent traits) and nurture (environmental factors).

Hidi and Renninger (2006) proposed a four-phase model of interest development, which provides insights into how individuals become interested in a particular topic or activity over time. These phases help explain the process of how initial encounters with a subject can lead to sustained and deep interest. The four phases are as follows:

1. Triggered situational interest (Triggering Phase): In this initial phase, individuals experience a "trigger" that sparks their interest. Triggers can be various stimuli, such as a book, a conversation, an event, or individual experiences. These triggers create curiosity and capture the individual's attention.
2. Maintained situational interest (Maintaining Phase): Once interest is triggered, it enters the maintaining phase, where individuals actively engage with the subject or activity. During this phase, individuals seek out more information, delve deeper into the topic, and may participate in related experiences.
3. Emerging, less developed individual interest (Developing Phase): In the developing phase, individuals start to form a deeper and more lasting interest. They make connections between the subject of interest and their existing knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. As their understanding and knowledge grow, so does their interest.
4. Well-developed individual interest (Consolidating Phase): The consolidating phase represents a more stable and enduring interest. Individuals in this phase have integrated the topic into their identity and life. They often pursue the subject as a long-term hobby, passion, or career. It becomes a part of who they are.

In summary, these phases help illustrate that interest is not a static or fixed trait but a dynamic process that evolves over time.

2.4 Motivation

Motivation is a broader construct than interest and is not specifically related to learning of particular disciplinary content. It is a psychological concept that drive and influence a person's behaviour, actions, and decisions. It plays a fundamental role in human life and is essential for achieving goals, making progress, and finding purpose. Understanding and managing motivation is critical for personal development, achieving professional success, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. It is a complex and multifaceted aspect of human behaviour that can vary from one person to another.

Motivation can be understood in various ways and is influenced by a combination of intrinsic factors that arise from within an individual as well as extrinsic factors that come from external influences. Some of the factors are basic human needs and desires, personal goals, beliefs, and values as well as social and environmental influences.

In an educational activity, motivation has a significant role to direct students' behaviour. It becomes an integral part of students in their learning to achieve their goal (Hanafi et al., 2018). Geng et al. (2019) points out that motivation is an essential factor in class learning activities.

2.5 Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge, often referred to as prior learning or prior experience, is a fundamental concept in the field of education. It refers to the knowledge, skills, and experiences that a learner has already possessed and accumulated before engaging in a new learning experience or educational activity. This prior knowledge can significantly influence how a person learns and comprehends new information, as well as their ability to make connections and transfer knowledge to new situations. In the context of education, some key points about prior knowledge are:

1. **Transfer of knowledge:** One of the goals of education is to enable learners to transfer knowledge and skills from one context to another. Prior knowledge plays a critical role in this transfer process. When students can relate the latest information to what they already know, they are more likely to apply their knowledge effectively in various situations.
2. **Influence on learning:** Prior knowledge can significantly influence a learner's ability to grasp new concepts. If a student has strong prior knowledge related to a particular topic, they may learn more quickly and comprehensively in that area. Conversely, if they lack relevant prior knowledge, it may hinder their understanding and progress.
3. **Assessment and differentiation:** When teachers are aware of students' prior knowledge, it can help them develop instructional approaches that maximize the child's learning experience. The learning process will be more efficient and effective (Drew, 2023).

3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are students prepared to learn the Arabic language in terms of their interest?
2. To what extent are students prepared to learn the Arabic language in terms of their motivation?
3. To what extent are students prepared to learn the Arabic language based on their prior knowledge of Arabic?

4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To collect data for this study, an online survey questionnaire was administered to 116 part 1 Diploma students enrolled in UiTM Cawangan Johor, specifically undertaking Arabic Language Level 1. Participants were selectively screened, with inclusion criteria requiring prior formal education in Arabic Language, at least up to the primary school level, ensuring their ability to contribute meaningful insights. The chosen students, possessing prior experiences in Arabic language education, were considered valuable informants for this study.

The research instrument employed in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire, encompassing statements that gauge learning readiness across three dimensions: interest (study willingness, maintaining a positive mindset, giving full attention, and openness to

acquiring new knowledge), motivation (motivation, enthusiasm, aspiration for outstanding performance, increased effort, and identification of weaknesses and work for improvement), and Arabic Language prior knowledge (knowledge of nouns, verbs, and particles, pronouns, understanding the verb conjugation, simple sentence construction, ability to create complete sentences, brief communication skills, and grammar mistake identification). Respondents used Likert-type scales to express their agreement with statements.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software, involving descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

5.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic backgrounds	Variables	Number	%
Gender	Male	53	45.7
	Female	63	54.3
Learning period	11 years	48	41.4
	10 years	1	0.9
	9 years	23	19.8
	7 years	44	37.9
Achievement	Good	25	21.6
	Average	57	49
	Not good	34	29.4

After a thorough follow-up, 116 students completed the survey and were considered valid for analysis (see Table 1 for demographic details). The respondents consisted of 63 female students (54.3%) and 53 male students (45.7%). Regarding prior Arabic learning periods, 48 students (41.4%) reported having at least 11 years of experience, with one student (0.9%) having 10 years, 23 students (19.8%) having 9 years, and 44 students (37.9%) having 7 years. In terms of achievement in prior Arabic learning, the majority (n=57, 49%) rated their performance as average, 34 students (29.4%) rated it as below average, and the remaining students (n=25, 21.6%) considered their achievement to be good.

Table 2. The Result of Student's Interest

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Study willingness	4.07	0.83	Moderately Ready
Maintaining positive mind set	4.06	0.81	Moderately Ready
Giving full attention	4.11	0.80	Moderately Ready
Openness to acquiring new knowledge	4.27	0.82	Very Much Ready
Overall	4.13	0.82	Moderately Ready

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 - Very Much Ready; 3.41 – 4.20 -Moderately Ready; 2.61 – 3.40 –Ready; 1.81 – 2.60 -Slightly Ready; 1.00 – 1.80 -Not Ready.

Based on the data gathered as shown in Table 2, the perceived learning readiness as to interest of the respondents has an overall mean of 4.13 signifying that the learners are moderately ready in term of interest in Arabic learning. It was further revealed that the respondents assessed openness to acquire new knowledge tied with the highest mean of 4.27 interpreted as very much ready. This is an interesting finding because it implies that the respondents are very much ready to acquire new knowledge in the context of learning Arabic. This suggests a strong willingness to learn and explore various aspects of the language. The second highest mean for the student interest variable is the indicator of students giving full attention which is a mean of 4.11 interpreted as moderately ready. The number implies that the respondents are moderately ready to give their full attention to their Arabic learning. This indicates a commitment to the task at hand. However, the respondents assessed study

willingness with a mean of 4.07, interpreted as moderately ready. This suggests a positive attitude toward studying the language, though there might be room for even greater willingness. On the other hand, maintaining a positive mind set received the lowest mean of 4.06, interpreted as moderately ready indicating that students, on average, have a moderately positive mindset when it comes to learning Arabic.

The findings of this study on readiness to learn, based on students' interests, align with some results from previous studies in this area. In a study by Mohamad and Wan (2016) on a group of students at several public higher education institutions in Malaysia, it was found that most students have a high interest in Arabic, although the efforts and practices they show are not in line with the stated interest. Similarly, the study of Abdullah et al. (2015) found that most of their respondents (83.9%) who are a group of junior high school students at SMKA Naim Lil Banat, Kelantan, have a good interest in Arabic subjects. This shows that the Arabic learning experience that they went through has successfully formed an interest in Arabic subjects at an encouraging level.

Table 3. The Result of Student's Motivation

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Motivated	4.00	0.79	Moderately Ready
Enthusiastic	4.02	0.76	Moderately Ready
Becoming an outstanding student	4.31	0.79	Very Much Ready
Increasing efforts	4.28	0.74	Very Much Ready
Identifying weaknesses and working on improvement	4.22	0.74	Very Much Ready
Overall	4.17	0.76	Moderately Ready

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 - Very Much Ready; 3.41 – 4.20 -Moderately Ready; 2.61 – 3.40 –Ready; 1.81 – 2.60 -Slightly Ready; 1.00 – 1.80 -Not Ready.

Table 3 displays the level of learning readiness in terms of motivation of the students with an overall mean of 4.17; learners are at the level of moderately ready in term of motivation in their Arabic lesson. The highest mean for the student motivation variable is 'becoming an outstanding student' which is a mean of 4.31. Having the highest mean, the respondents signify that they are able to see the importance of purpose setting in learning Arabic subject. Their attitude as a learner contributes a great factor to whether they will excel or not in Arabic learning. The second highest mean for the student motivation variable is the indicator of students increasing their learning efforts which is a mean of 4.28. Next, the third highest item for student motivation variables is the indicator of 'identifying weaknesses and working on improvements' which is a mean of 4.22. The results of the first two indicators, 'motivated' (mean: 4.00) and 'enthusiastic' (mean: 4.02), are high and quite similar in magnitude, indicating that, on average, students are moderately motivated and enthusiastic about their Arabic learning.

The contrast between the first two indicators, considered moderately ready, and the next three, considered very much ready, suggests that while students are generally motivated and enthusiastic, they are even more prepared and motivated to excel and put in increased effort in their Arabic learning. The latter three indicators indicate a remarkably prominent level of readiness to succeed and improve, reflecting a strong commitment to their Arabic studies. This contrast in results suggests that students not only have a baseline motivation and enthusiasm but are also particularly driven to excel and continuously improve in their Arabic learning.

Arabic scholars often study motivational elements in learning Arabic, exploring aspects such as the level of students' motivation, factors influencing motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels, and students' motivational beliefs. The study of student motivation is also often linked to aspects such as students' attitudes and academic achievement in Arabic.

Some studies that specifically measure students' motivation levels produce the same findings as this study. Among them, the findings of Fadzil et al. (2019) on 316 fifth-form students in six Arabic secondary schools of the Melaka Department of Islamic Religion (SMA JAIM) who sat for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exam in 2017 for the Arabic subject found that on average, the respondent's score for student motivation was at a high level.

Meanwhile, Derahman (2011) conducted a study related to the motivation of learning Arabic among Tourism diploma students in the Hospitality Department at Merlimau Polytechnic, Melaka. The results of the study show that the level of student motivation towards learning Arabic is at a prominent level.

In conclusion, investigations into student motivation levels across different levels consistently yield positive and encouraging outcomes. These results are likely influenced by a combination of internal and external factors that impact students engaged in the study of Arabic. The prevailing motivation observed in various studies underscores the potential for successful and fulfilling experiences in Arabic language education.

Table 4. The Result of Student's Arabic Language Prior Knowledge

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation	
Knowing nouns, verbs & particles	3.42	0.98	Moderately Ready	
Knowing pronouns	3.64	0.96	Moderately Ready	
Understanding the conjugation of verbs	3.36	1.11	Ready	
Know how to construct simple sentences		3.39	1.10	Ready
Able to create complete sentences	3.19	1.08	Ready	
Able to communicate briefly	2.95	1.06	Ready	
Able to identify grammar mistakes	2.88	1.04	Ready	
Overall	3.26	1.05	Ready	

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 - Very Much Ready; 3.41 – 4.20 -Moderately Ready; 2.61 – 3.40 –Ready; 1.81 – 2.60 -Slightly Ready; 1.00 – 1.80 -Not Ready.

Based on the findings in Table 4, the assessment of students' Arabic learning readiness in term of their Arabic language prior knowledge shows an overall mean of 3.26, indicating that the learners are ready. 'Knowing pronouns' received the highest mean of 3.64, indicating a moderately ready level. The second variable, 'knowing nouns, verbs, and particles,' was also assessed as moderately ready (3.42). However, the respondents assessed the other five variables as ready. The variable 'know how to construct simple sentences' (3.39) received the highest mean that indicates readiness, followed by 'understanding the conjugation of verbs' (3.36), 'able to create complete sentences' (3.19), and 'able to communicate briefly' (2.95). Meanwhile, the variable 'able to identify grammar mistakes' (2.88) received the lowest mean score.

These results show that students are more confident about their prior knowledge related to nouns, verbs, particles, and pronouns compared to the conjugation of verbs (the third variable) and constructing simple sentences (the fourth variable). The other three variables (able to create complete sentences, able to communicate briefly and able to identify grammar mistakes) are related to their ability to express themselves visually and verbally. Confidence in speaking, constructing sentences, and understanding verb conjugation may be influenced by the students' perception of their oral and written communication skills. These skills, crucial for practical language use, likely contribute to why they are assessed as ready rather than moderately ready.

Scholarly exploration into the prior knowledge of the Arabic language is relatively rare. This study is pioneering in its research on the level of mastery of students regarding their existing knowledge of Arabic.

6.0 SUGGESTIONS

For future research, several critical areas warrant attention and exploration. Firstly, given the scarcity of research on prior knowledge of Arabic, it is imperative to enhance the depth and breadth of studies in this domain. Specifically, research focusing on foundational topics in Arabic, beyond just the willingness to learn, can contribute significantly to the existing knowledge base.

The following recommendations provide a framework for potential future studies:

1. **Study of the Relationship Between Prior Knowledge of Arabic and Students' Interest and Motivation:** explore the intricate connections between students' prior knowledge of Arabic and their levels of interest and motivation. Understanding how prior knowledge influences these motivational aspects can shed light on effective strategies for enhancing engagement.
2. **Comprehensive Study of Prior Knowledge of the Arabic Language:** undertake a more extensive and in-depth exploration of basic topics within the Arabic language. By delving deeper into specific language components, researchers can uncover nuanced insights into students' mastery and comprehension.
3. **Holistic Examination of Prior Knowledge and Its Relationship with Educational Outcomes:** conduct a comprehensive study examining the broader impact of prior knowledge, particularly its correlation with various educational aspects, such as students' overall achievement. This would provide a holistic understanding of how prior knowledge influences academic outcomes.

By addressing these research avenues, scholars can contribute not only to the field of Arabic language education but also to the broader understanding of how prior knowledge interfaces with students' motivation, learning outcomes, and educational experiences.

7.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an in-depth exploration into students' pre-existing interests, motivations, and knowledge levels before commencing studies in a particular field stands as an imperative undertaking. The revelations arising from such research endeavours carry profound implications for instructional design, facilitating the formulation of pedagogical methods that effectively sustain and elevate students' levels of interest and motivation.

Moreover, a nuanced understanding of students' pre-existing knowledge not only contributes to the enhancement of their proficiency in the subject matter, specifically in the domain of Arabic language studies in this instance but also holds broader applications that extend across diverse academic disciplines. The significance of this investigation is not confined solely to linguistic pursuits; rather, it extends to the broader educational landscape. Such insights empower educators to craft tailored approaches that resonate with the cognitive and motivational dimensions of learners, fostering an enriched and enduring educational experience.

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