

Arabic Language Learning: An In-Depth Examination of Students' Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

This study aimed to provide an extensive analysis of the challenges faced by students at the SD-IT Riyadhoturrohan, Mandailing Natal in the process of learning the Arabic language and proposes effective solutions to overcome these obstacles. Arabic is a language of rich cultural and historical significance, yet its complexity poses unique challenges for learners. By delving into the specific difficulties encountered by students, this research seeks to contribute valuable and effective insights to teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers involved in Arabic language learning practices.

Keywords: *Arabic Language Learning, Challenges, Solutions*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan analisis mendalam terhadap tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para siswa SD-IT Riyadhoturrohan, Mandailing Natal dalam proses pembelajaran bahasa Arab dan menawarkan solusi yang efektif untuk mengatasi hambatan ini. Bahasa Arab adalah bahasa dengan signifikansi budaya dan sejarah yang kaya, namun kompleksitasnya menimbulkan tantangan unik bagi para pelajar. Dengan menyelami kesulitan khusus yang dihadapi mahasiswa, penelitian ini akan memberikan wawasan yang berharga dan efektif bagi pendidik, pengembang kurikulum, dan pembuat kebijakan yang terlibat dalam praktik pembelajaran bahasa Arab.

Kata Kunci: *Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab, Tantangan, Solusi*

Introduction

The pursuit of Arabic language proficiency among non-native speakers is an educational endeavor laden with unique challenges, necessitating a thorough examination to address and enhance the learning experience (Khasawneh and Khasawneh, 2022). The complexities inherent in learning Arabic have become a subject of reserchers interest, as educators and policymakers seek to understand, adapt, and optimize pedagogical approaches for this intricate language (Umam and Nada, 2021).

In an era of increasing globalization, the Arabic language has gained prominence beyond its traditional geographical boundaries (Redkin and Bernikova, 2016). The rising interest in Arabic language learning is driven by factors such as expanding economic ties, geopolitical developments, and a broader recognition of the cultural and historical significance embedded in the language.

Arabic is not merely a means of communication but a carrier of rich cultural heritage, literature, and religious texts (Ernst, 2013). Learning Arabic opens doors to understanding the nuances of Islamic civilization, Middle Eastern traditions, and an array of diverse cultures. Therefore, the process of learning Arabic presents multifaceted challenges (Maimunah, Sutaman, and Zubaidah, 2023). The intricate grammar, diverse dialects, and a script that differs from commonly encountered writing systems all contribute to a steep learning curve (Shaalan et al., 2018). Students often grapple with the complexities of Arabic, and understanding these challenges is essential for devising effective learning strategies.

The barriers students face in learning Arabic can have a direct impact on their educational attainment and overall academic success (Hastang and Ahmad, 2023). As the demand for Arabic language proficiency grows, addressing these challenges becomes imperative for facilitating successful language acquisition. In addition, teachers and curriculum developers face the task of designing instructional methods that cater to the unique characteristics of the Arabic language. The diversity of dialects, cultural contexts, and script intricacies necessitates a nuanced and adaptive approach to teaching (Alnosairee and Sartini 2021; Syuhadak, Hilmi, and Rosyidah, 2021).

Proficiency in Arabic contributes not only to individual linguistic skills but also fosters global competence and cross-cultural understanding (Trang and Phuong, 2023). Effective language learning strategies can bridge cultural gaps and promote international collaboration and communication. Likewise, the integration of technology in Arabic language learning has opened new possibilities for overcoming traditional challenges (Rani et al., 2023). Exploring innovative educational technologies and digital learning tools can enhance the effectiveness of Arabic language instruction.

Based on the data provided, this research seeks to conduct a comprehensive exploration of the various challenges faced by students at SD-IT Riyadhhoturrohman in their Arabic language learning. The main objective is to investigate in depth these challenges and, subsequently, propose feasible and effective solutions. Besides that, this research aims to reveal the intricacies related to the diverse backgrounds of students, with the ultimate goal of providing insights that can be input for teachers and policy makers.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative (Creswell, 2014), this method was used to systematically investigate students' experiences at the Riyadhoturrohman Integrated Islamic Elementary School (or SD-IT Riyadhoturrohman for short), Mandailing Natal in learning Arabic. The study employed a cross-sectional approach to capture a snapshot of students' challenges and solutions at a specific point in time. While data collection techniques include structured surveys, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, to describe the challenges facing students and the proposed solutions. Purposive sampling aimed to ensure a diversity of participants reflecting varying levels of proficiency and cultural backgrounds.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this research investigated the complex challenges that students at SD-IT Riyadhoturrohman face as they strive to achieve proficiency in Arabic language skills. In addition, this research provided in-depth observations regarding the efficacy of the suggested solutions in addressing these challenges.

1. Challenges in Arabic Language Learning

a. Complex Grammar and Syntax

Arabic grammar is known for its high complexity, involving intricate rules and deep word conjugations (Mannaa, Azmi, and Aboalsamh, 2022; Hmoud et al., 2023). The grammatical structure of Arabic requires a profound understanding of complex linguistic concepts, often posing challenges for learners (Khasawneh and Khasawneh, 2022). At a basic level, this structure includes concepts such as mufrad (singular) and plural (plural), as well as distinctions between masculine and feminine forms (Abdullah, 2008). However, the complexity intensifies with the introduction of aspects such as states (marfu', mansub, and majrur), positioning (muqaddam and mu'akhhkar), and those related to specific times and conditions. For example, in verb conjugation, there are not only changes in suffixes depending on the subject but also modifications in the root of the word itself based on time, word type, and other variations. Therefore, learning Arabic grammar requires a deep understanding of these concepts, which can be a significant challenge, especially for learners who are new to the language (Hastang and Ahmad, 2023). Overcoming these difficulties may take a considerable amount of time and effort. In this context, a teaching approach that supports gradual understanding, emphasizing practical exercises and real-life contexts, can be key to helping learners navigate the complexity of Arabic grammar.

Students studying Arabic often encounter difficulties in comprehending this intricate grammar. For example, verb conjugations in Arabic involve various forms depending on the subject, object, and tense. For example, the verb "to write" in Arabic, كَتَبَ (kataba), can take various forms such as يَكْتُبُ (yaktubu) for the third person singular in the present tense, and كَتَبَ (katab) for the third person singular in the past tense. Accurately understanding and applying these concepts necessitate high-level grammatical skills and can be time-consuming, constituting a significant aspect of the challenges faced by students in learning the Arabic language. Therefore, understanding the complexity of Arabic grammar and providing a teaching approach that supports this understanding is crucial to help students overcome these challenges.

When studying Arabic, Riyadhhoturrohman Elementary School students often have difficulty understanding this complicated grammar. In this context, especially in understanding verb conjugation in Arabic which involves various forms depending on the subject, object and tense. For example, the verb "to write" in Arabic, كَتَبَ (kataba), can have various forms such as يَكْتُبُ (yaktubu) for the third person singular in the present tense, and كَتَبَ (katab) for the third person singular in the past tense. Understanding and accurately applying these concepts requires high-level grammar skills and can be time-consuming, which is an important aspect of the challenges students face in learning Arabic. Therefore, understanding the complexities of Arabic grammar and providing teaching approaches that support that understanding is essential to help students overcome these challenges.

b. Diversity of Dialects

The diversity of dialects in Arabic is a striking characteristic but also presents great challenges for learners (Kwaik et al., 2018). This phenomenon involves a variety of dialects that are influenced by various cultural and regional factors, bringing variations in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar that can differ significantly from one region to another. (Alnosairee and Sartini, 2021) The Arabic language, with its extensive history and geographical spread, has given rise to a multitude of dialects that coexist with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (Alresaini, 2016; Aboelezz, 2016). These dialects are intricately linked to local cultures and history, contributing to their uniqueness. The variations go beyond differences in pronunciation, encompassing nuances in everyday vocabulary, colloquial expressions, and grammatical structures (Siregar, 2017). For example, a common phrase in one dialect may have a completely different counterpart in another, and the subtleties of intonation can drastically alter the meaning of words.

For learners, the challenge lies not only in grasping the grammatical structures and vocabulary but also in adapting to regional nuances. The pronunciation of certain sounds, the choice of words for common objects or actions, and even the preferred grammatical constructs

may differ significantly. This complexity becomes particularly evident in spoken communication, where exposure to different dialects requires learners to develop a keen ear for linguistic subtleties. For example, differences in the pronunciation of syllables or everyday words like "water" can vary between the Egyptian, Levantine, and Maghrebi dialects. For example, the word "water" in the Egyptian dialect is "maa," while in the Levantine dialect, it might be pronounced as "mayya" or "moya." Additionally, disparities in vocabulary and grammar among these dialects can create barriers in everyday understanding and communication (Negoro, Jamaluddin, and Amiruddin, 2022). The influence of media and globalization may introduce learners to specific dialects, but understanding the broad range of dialectal variations remains a challenge, especially when interacting with native speakers or in various regional contexts (Hjarvard, 2004). Therefore, comprehension and exposure to various dialects, along with awareness of their contextual usage, become crucial skills for those learning the Arabic language.

Ali, Kazemian, and Mahar (2015) stated that understanding the cultural context embedded in each dialect is crucial for effective communication. Dialect often carries historical, social, and cultural connotations that influence word and expression choices. Therefore, learning Arabic involves not only acquiring linguistic skills but also acquiring cultural literacy to navigate the intricacies of dialectical communication (Moustafa, 2020).

In essence, the diversity of dialects in the Arabic language introduces a layer of intrigue that extends beyond linguistic variations. It intertwines language with culture, history, and regional identity, making the journey of learning Arabic a dynamic and multifaceted exploration into the richness of Arabic linguistic and cultural heritage.

c. Script Difficulties

The Arabic script, characterized by its distinctive right-to-left writing direction, presents a unique challenge for learners who are accustomed to left-to-right writing systems. This script, known as an alphabet, employs a cursive style that connects letters within words, adding an additional layer of complexity to the learning process (Prochwicz-Studnicka, 2019). Grasping the intricacies of Arabic calligraphy requires not only understanding the individual shapes of letters but also mastering their contextual variations based on their position within a word.

Students venturing into the realm of Arabic language learning often find themselves grappling with the intricacies of the script. Unlike left-to-right scripts commonly used in Western languages, the Arabic script demands a paradigm shift, introducing learners to a new spatial orientation. For example, writing the word "Arabic" in Arabic script (العربية) requires a reversal of the order familiar to those accustomed to left-to-right languages.

The cursive nature of the Arabic script means that letters undergo changes in form depending on their position within a word (Gharaibeh and Alhassan, 2023). This phenomenon, known as contextual variation, can be challenging for learners to master. The letter "ب" (baa) may have a different form when it appears at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. Navigating these variations with accuracy is crucial for producing legible and contextually correct written Arabic.

d. Cultural Context

Cultural differences can impact the learning of Arabic in various ways (Mahfud et al., 2021). So that Arab culture often has social norms and values that are different from Arab culture student culture (Setiadi and Yunaldi, 2023). For non-native speakers, adjusting to cultural differences can be a challenge, and it can lead to cultural frustration and disappointment. The lack of encouragement given to learning Arabic and the characteristics of the Arabic language teaching programs in a country can also affect the learning of Arabic. In addition, exposure to different dialects and the need to develop a keen ear for linguistic subtleties in spoken communication can also pose challenges for learners. However, cultural diversity can also motivate students to learn Arabic language. Arabic and many aspects of Arab culture spread worldwide through Islam, and the cultural connections between Arabic and Islam make it easy to conflate "Arab" and "Muslim". Therefore, understanding the cultural context of the Arabic language and its speakers can be crucial for learners to develop proficiency in the language.

In summary, cultural differences impact the learning of Arabic by influencing the motivation to learn the language, the teaching programs available, and the challenges associated with adapting to linguistic and social nuances. Understanding and navigating these cultural differences are essential for a comprehensive and effective learning experience.

Arabic teachers face several challenges when teaching in a culturally diverse classroom (Khasawneh and Khasawneh, 2022). These challenges include language barriers, self-motivation, content difficulties, differences in levels of understanding, and adapting to the new classroom reality (Hastang and Ahmad, 2023). Additionally, cultural boundaries and ideologies based on cultural predisposition can also affect the teaching of Arabic, as they may restrict expression and lead to misunderstandings between teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds (Grozdanoski, 2019).

Teachers who graduate from abroad usually bring experience and learning systems there that are very different from the characteristics of students in Indonesia. According to Setiadi, Fuadi, and Daulay (2022) in their research results stated that every educational institution in Indonesia has its own curriculum system that suits the characteristics of its students. so using the

same teaching methods can lead to ineffective learning in culturally diverse classrooms.. Therefore, it is very important for educators to be aware of and sensitive to these cultural differences in order to create an effective and inclusive learning environment in Arabic language teaching.

Therefore, understanding Arabic goes hand in hand with uncovering its cultural context. Students must accept the challenge of understanding cultural nuances and historical foundations to achieve comprehensive proficiency in Arabic. The language is a gateway to a rich cultural tapestry, where every word not only carries linguistic meaning but also reflects the centuries-old traditions, beliefs and values of the Arab world.

2. Proposed Solutions in Overcoming Arabic Language Learning Problems

a. Interactive Learning Platforms

In the era of digital education, interactive learning platforms have emerged as powerful tools to enrich language acquisition (Haleem et al., 2022). The platform leverages technology to actively engage learners, offering a dynamic and immersive experience that goes beyond traditional methods. For Arabic language learners, this platform plays an important role in providing a holistic and real language learning environment.

The interactive learning platform combines various features to create a dynamic learning experience. This often includes interactive exercises, multimedia resources, and real-world simulations that allow learners to apply language skills in authentic contexts (Khamparia and Pandey, 2017). In the context of learning Arabic, a platform might integrate virtual dialogues in which learners engage in conversations with simulated native speakers, thereby providing an opportunity to practice language use in everyday scenarios.

One of the important advantages of this platform is its adaptability to different learning styles. Interactive exercises can cater to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners, ensuring a more personalized learning journey. Visual learners can benefit from multimedia presentations, while auditory learners can engage with spoken dialogue and pronunciation practice. Kinesthetic learners can participate in interactive activities that involve hands-on language practice.

b. Dialect-Focused Curriculum

A dialect-focused curriculum in Arabic language education involves adapting courses to introduce students to various Arabic dialects, while recognizing the linguistic diversity that exists in the Arabic-speaking world (Alnosairee and Sartini, 2021). This approach recognizes that Arabic is not a monolithic language but encompasses a spectrum of regional variations, each of which has unique pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical features.

In traditional Arabic education, emphasis is often placed on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a formal variety used in literature, media, and formal settings. However, this approach may not fully prepare students for the linguistic realities they may encounter in everyday conversations in Arab countries.

Dialect-focused curricula attempt to bridge this gap by including exposure to different Arabic dialects. For example, rather than studying MSA exclusively, students can engage with materials and activities that reflect the linguistic characteristics of Egyptian, Saudi Arabia, or Maghrebi dialects. This exposure allows students to understand not only the formal aspects of Arabic but also the colloquial expressions and regional variations that shape everyday communication.

c. Script Workshop

Script workshop in Arabic language education are specialized sessions designed to address learners' challenges in mastering the Arabic script. According to Fitria (2023), this script workshop in Arabic language provide targeted practice, guidance, and interactive activities to enhance students' proficiency in reading and writing Arabic script. The focus is on addressing specific difficulties learners may encounter, such as the right-to-left writing direction, contextual variations, and the cursive nature of Arabic script.

This workshop aimed to create a supportive learning environment where learners can overcome obstacles associated with script mastery. This workshop can be organized at various proficiency levels, catering to grappling beginners with basic script recognition and advanced learners refining their calligraphic skills.

As such, script workshop plays an important role in overcoming students' challenges in using the Arabic script, offering a customized and immersive experience that goes beyond conventional classroom teaching. Combining targeted practice, individualized guidance, and interactive activities, this workshop empowers learners to navigate the complexities of the Arabic script with confidence and proficiency.

d. Cultural Immersion Programs

Cultural immersion programs in Arabic language learning go beyond traditional language instruction by integrating immersive components that expose students to the diverse and rich cultural tapestry associated with the Arabic language. These programs aim to foster a deeper understanding of the language by immersing learners in authentic cultural contexts, allowing them to connect language skills with real-life cultural experiences.

In the cultural immersion program, students at the SD-IT Riyadhoturrohman can visit an Arab village called Parmeraan Village which is located in the Dolok District, North Padang

Lawas Regency (Paluta), North Sumatra (Rifianty n.d.). Students can interact with local people and traders, and learn about the cultural meaning of various products. They can also participate in local festivals, engage in cultural activities, try traditional foods, and interact with community members.

Cultural immersion programs in Arabic language education offer a holistic approach that goes beyond language acquisition. By intertwining language learning with cultural experiences, these programs enrich students' understanding of the Arabic language, fostering not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural competence and a genuine appreciation for the diverse Arab heritage.

Conclusion

Based on the explanation of the findings above, this research reveals that Arabic language learning at SD-IT Riyadhhoturrohman involves several significant challenges, including the complexity of grammar, dialectal diversity, script difficulties, and the influence of cultural context. These challenges can impede students in achieving adequate Arabic language skills. Nevertheless, the proposed solutions, such as the gradual teaching approach, a curriculum focused on dialects, script workshops, and cultural immersion programs, offer concrete steps to overcome these obstacles. By integrating the use of interactive learning platforms, students can have a more dynamic and comprehensive learning experience. In conclusion, a holistic approach that combines language skills with cultural understanding is the key to enhancing the effectiveness of Arabic language learning at SD-IT Riyadhhoturrohman, ensuring that students not only master linguistic aspects but also connect with the cultural meaning inherent in the Arabic language.

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