

Exploring the significance of Arabic language proficiency in contemporary education: Insights from Indonesian students in Tunisia

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ABSTRACT Arabic proficiency is vital in education, especially for understanding the Qur'an and hadith. It also supports effective foreign-language communication in daily life. This study examines Indonesian students studying in Tunisia, using a qualitative approach to explore how learning Arabic influences their cultural awareness and appreciation. The research emphasizes the significance of recent findings in guiding further inquiry. By examining various techniques and educational approaches, the study highlights the transformative potential of the Arabic language learning process in Tunisian schools. This integration of Arabic language instruction with other subjects fosters an effective learning environment, particularly for Indonesian students, facilitating proficiency in muhadatsah, kitabah, qiro'ah, and Istima'. Ultimately, implementing the appropriate educational strategies cultivates competent Arabic language learners and promotes a culture of Arabic language acquisition among Indonesian students.

Keywords: *Arabic Language Proficiency, Indonesian Students, Cultural Awareness, Language Learning Process.*

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INTRODUCTION

This study delves into the pivotal role of Arabic language proficiency within the context of contemporary education (Muhammad Jundi, 2023), spotlighting the experiences of Indonesian students in Tunisia. In an era where globalization and intercultural interactions are at their zenith, mastering the Arabic language emerges as a crucial asset for students (Hadiniyati, G., Annisa, D. T., Nugroho, C. P., & Lestari, 2023), particularly those from Indonesia, in navigating their academic and social lives in Tunisia. The research aims to unravel how this linguistic skill influences their educational journey, integration into the local culture, and overall academic success. By examining the narratives of these students, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the significance of Arabic language proficiency in an educational landscape that increasingly values linguistic diversity and cultural adaptability.

Arabic, spoken by around 200 million people globally, serves as a vital global communication language and is deeply intertwined with Islamic teachings (Rizqi, 2024). The

language's significance stems from its role as the language of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, and as a means of spreading Islamic values and knowledge. Mastery of Arabic is crucial for understanding the Quran and Islamic teachings (Sapitri et al., 2025), making it an essential competency for Muslims. Additionally, Arabic's historical development and diverse dialects highlight its rich linguistic heritage, further emphasizing its importance in both religious and global contexts (Laatar, Aloulou, et al., 2022). Arabic has a rich historical significance as an international language, comparable to English and French today. The language's evolution and semantic development lack a comprehensive historical dictionary, hindering a full understanding of its scientific heritage (Laatar, Rhayem, et al., 2022). Arabic's influence extends beyond the Middle East, with its spread to Asia through trade networks and the rise of Islam, impacting languages like English in Asian contexts (Al-Wer et al., 2022). When we look at the history of the spread of the Arabic language in Indonesia, starting with the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, we find ancient writings that were taught in Islamic boarding schools or gatherings. By learning Arabic, individuals aim to delve into various aspects such as worship, *aqidah* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *mu'amalah* (transactions). Understanding Arabic is crucial for Muslim learners, as it allows them to access religious texts and deepen their comprehension of Islamic teachings and practices (Burhanuddin, Ramadhan & Pramesti, 2025).

Additionally, analyzing Arabic curricula can provide insights into the content related to these areas, aiding in tailoring educational materials to meet specific learning outcomes. The spread of the Arabic language to the Indonesian archipelago was facilitated by trading activities of Arabs, contributing significantly to the dissemination of Islam in the region (Rufaiqoh & Ulum, 2024). Arabic itself comes from the Semitic language family and has a large number of speakers, such as in the Middle East. The development of the Arabic language in Indonesia began with the introduction of Islam into the Nusantara region, now known as Indonesia. Although Arabic is the language of the Quran, most Indonesians still view it primarily as a religious language, so its development is concentrated among Muslims in Islamic boarding schools or Islamic schools. Arabic has not been adopted as a common language of communication among the general populace, unlike in some Islamic countries where it is used daily (Nofal, 2023). Learning Arabic involves utilizing diverse strategies and tools to go beyond mere imitation (Afril et al., 2024).

Learning Arabic is crucial for delving into the depths of Islamic knowledge found in the Quran and Hadith (Stanley, 2023a). Arabic language proficiency enhances the ability to conduct comprehensive research and explore information within the Quran, leading to valuable findings for the Muslim community. Studies show that utilizing question and answer methods in Arabic learning significantly boosts student engagement and activity (Bani Hani, 2022), (Ritonga et al., 2021). Islamic education in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools plays a crucial role in fostering Arabic language proficiency and Islamic knowledge among students (Makruf et al., 2022; Musaddad, 2023). These schools integrate Arabic texts extensively, shaping a strong Islamic culture and influence beyond the classroom. The emphasis on the Arabic language in the curriculum not only enhances religious studies but also instills cultural values. Additionally, Islamic universities in Indonesia further promote Arabic language learning, catering to the country's predominantly Muslim population. This focus on Arabic language education not only aids in Quranic studies but also facilitates communication with non-Indonesian Muslims. Educators are tasked with motivating students to excel in learning Arabic, essential for Quranic understanding and cross-cultural interactions (Sa'diyah & Abdurahman, 2021), (Hefner, 2022).

The challenge of developing Arabic language education in Indonesia is that there is still low interest and motivation in learning Arabic. Students often seek instant solutions without a diligent and serious learning process. In the educational realm, many students majoring in Arabic struggle with mastering Arabic communication. Apart from the inherent difficulties and low level of Arabic language learning, the limited role of Arabic language teachers also influences motivation to learn Arabic (Ritonga et al., 2023). Motivation in learning Arabic is a non-intellectual psychological factor; its typical role is to increase the growth of passion, happiness,

and enthusiasm for learning activities, necessitating a fun and innovative learning environment for Arabic (Edidarmo & Fudhaili, 2023). Thus, by having competent Arabic language educators, an effective and innovative Arabic language learning process can be achieved, through understanding learning strategies or appropriate methods to foster a desirable Arabic language culture for communication with Arab people (Sudirman et al., 2021).

The fundamental issues in learning Arabic stem from linguistic challenges inherent in the language and non-linguistic problems arising from the competence of educators, social culture, infrastructure, curriculum, learning media, and student motivation. Thus, motivation, learning tools, and media become critical in motivating the learning process, enabling students to master Arabic language material (Abdul Rohman, 2022). The development of Arabic language educator competency is being advanced from elementary to higher education levels. The paradigm of Arabic language learning is evolving from a tool for spiritualization to one for identification, with full support from the Indonesian government, which has a majority Muslim population, and the Arab government, which should strengthen ties by providing scholarship access for students to enhance their Arabic language skills (Takdir, 2020).

Research illustrates the challenges non-Arabic students face in mastering Arabic at Al Azhar University Indonesia. The minimal number of study hours makes learning Arabic challenging, especially for students not specializing in Arabic, leading to a lack of vocabulary mastery and discussions that only cater to students who are proficient (Fauziah et al., 2020) (Rachman, 2021). Other research highlights the significance of Arabic literature in conveying Islamic da'wah. Mastery of Arabic literature is crucial for communication with foreigners and for spreading Islamic da'wah internationally. It also supports understanding Islamic values, inspiration, motivation, communication skills, and the use of modern technology, such as the internet, to facilitate Arabic learning, showing that Arabic literature is not only a cultural heritage but also a vital communication skill in da'wah activities (Burhanuddin et al., 2024).

While existing studies have extensively explored the significance of Arabic language proficiency among Indonesian students, there is a noticeable gap in comprehensive research focusing on the nuanced experiences of these students in non-Arabic speaking countries like Tunisia. The majority of previous research has predominantly concentrated on the challenges and solutions within the Indonesian context or in predominantly Arabic-speaking nations. Additionally, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on the impact of Arabic language proficiency on the academic performance and cultural integration of Indonesian students in such unique environments. This research introduces a novel perspective by examining the specific experiences, challenges, and adaptations of Indonesian students in Tunisia, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of the interplay between language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and educational success in a globalized educational setting.

METHOD

The research adopted a qualitative methodology to delve into how Arabic language proficiency fosters cultural appreciation among Indonesian students in Tunisia. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing descriptive data, often textual, from observed subjects in language research (Candra Susanto et al., 2024). This method enables an in-depth exploration of data corresponding to the core research questions, particularly focusing on the role of Arabic language learning in cultural appreciation among these students. The participants were Indonesian students enrolled in Tunisian universities in 2022. The study employed a case study approach to systematically investigate various instances, gathering precise data through observations, interviews, and document analysis. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences, culminating in detailed case reporting (Stanley, 2023). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on Indonesian students actively engaged in their academic pursuits in Tunisia. Data were collected through observations of students' language

usage and interactions, both on campus and within the broader Tunisian context. Interviews were conducted in two formats: indirect, via questionnaires in Arabic, and direct, through conversational trials with peers. This dual approach provided a richer understanding of the students' language proficiency and its impact on their cultural integration. Interviews utilized open-ended techniques to foster in-depth discussions with students, offering insights into the influence of Arabic language learning on their cultural appreciation. When face-to-face interviews were not feasible, social media platforms served as alternative venues for data collection.

Table I. Arabic Language Learning on Cultural Appreciation

<i>No</i>	<i>Observation</i>	<i>Activity</i>
1	Learning process	The learning process carried out in Tunisia is based on Arabic, where the learning pattern using Arabic has a very effective effect for Indonesian students to learn to master Arabic.
2	Culture	In fact, as an Islamic country, the language used for daily communication is Arabic. So that an environment based on Arabic makes Indonesian students' competence more proficient in increasing mastery of the Arabic language.

Table 1 summarizes the key observations related to how the Arabic language learning process and the cultural environment in Tunisia influence Indonesian students' language proficiency and cultural appreciation. The observations focus on two main activities: the learning process and cultural immersion. First, learning Process: This observation highlights the effectiveness of the Arabic-based learning approach in Tunisia. The educational setting, where Arabic is the medium of instruction, significantly aids Indonesian students in enhancing their Arabic language proficiency. The immersion in an academic environment where Arabic is predominantly used not only facilitates language acquisition but also deepens the students' understanding and appreciation of the Arabic language's nuances. Second, Culture: The second observation underscores the impact of the Arabic-speaking environment on the students. Tunisia, being an Islamic country, predominantly uses Arabic in daily communication. This constant exposure to the Arabic language in various social contexts allows Indonesian students to improve their language skills practically and organically. The immersion in a culture where Arabic is integral helps students to not only master the language but also to gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural and religious aspects intertwined with the language.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation, assessing the consistency of findings across various sources, methods, and timeframes (Santos et al., 2020). The analysis comprised three stages: data reduction, where data from diverse sources were synthesized; data display, presenting information systematically; and conclusion drawing, where the processed data were interpreted to elucidate the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussing Arabic language learning and cultural appreciation in this research is paramount as it offers an intricate understanding of how language proficiency is not just about linguistic skills but also about gaining a profound comprehension of the cultural context in which the language is used. This dual focus provides invaluable insights into the symbiotic relationship between language acquisition and cultural immersion, particularly for Indonesian students in Tunisia, showcasing how language acts as a critical tool for intercultural communication and integration. By exploring these two aspects, the study not only highlights the educational benefits of language proficiency but also underscores its significance in fostering global competencies, cultural

sensitivity, and personal growth in an increasingly interconnected world, thus contributing to the broader discourse on the role of language in shaping educational and cross-cultural experiences.

Detailed Analysis of Arabic Language Learning

Learning is a process of activities carried out by a person to obtain a new change in behavior as a whole as a result of experience in interaction with the educational environment. Sudirman believes that learning is systematic behavior or performance consisting of reading, seeing, changing hearing, imitating and other five sense activities, (Hidayat, 2012). Slameto also explained that learning is a systematic activity of the body and soul to get feedback from individual experience activities in interactions in an environment consisting of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects, Learning is an activity that provides program experience in carrying out educational obligations so that students have the competence to realize the role of education in community life. In Ningrum's view, learning is the realization of a learning process from effective and systematic activities in carrying out the educational process. Systematic is a learning activity starting from preparation or planning, activities and implementation of learning assessments, (Sholihin et al., 2021). Law no. 23 of 2003 in SISDIKNAS defines learning as a reciprocal activity between learning resources and education in a learning place, Learning is a multifaceted process crucial for educational success, involving educational activities, learning theories, and active student participation (Alamsyah & Nuha, 2024).

Arabic language learning is carried out as a form of cultural appreciation among pupils or students so that learning carried out at Tunisian universities provides mandatory programs for active use of Arabic, so that students work hard to learn. The learning process provided is based on Arabic as a habituation process in providing Arabic language learning experiences.

“Learning is carried out systematically where the process emphasizes conversation-based vocabulary mastery, so that mastering Arabic can be done in a complex manner, in mastering Arabic language understanding.”

The learning process is carried out on the basis of Arabic conversation by discussing several themes to grow Arabic vocabulary during Arabic language learning. The learning process using this method is a superior curriculum carried out at the University of Tunisia. So that all students, especially from Indonesia, get maximum learning experience in mastering Arabic.

“As for the program, apart from that, there are also assignments for individual students in their daily lives to use Arabic to increase their mastery of Arabic vocabulary.”

“Learning is also carried out on the basis of presentation practice to facilitate mastering the Arabic accent. Apart from that, this practice program also provides habituation to form an Arabic language culture.”

Arabic language learning is carried out to provide experience and mentality in mastering competence in using Arabic. With a lot of practice, it can encourage Indonesian students' understanding of composing using the local language. This method motivates Indonesian students to develop competence in the field of Arabic.

Cultural Appreciation Through Language Proficiency

The definition of culture in the KBBI is a thought or attitude that has become a habit and is difficult to change, (KBBI, 2023). According to Koentjaraningrat, the definition of culture is all human power and activities in managing and carrying out changes in the universe. This form of appreciation for interactive Arabic language learning forms a process of providing a more proactive learning experience, by getting used to writing habits and practicing using Arabic, to create teaching graduates who are more competent mentally and knowledgeably. Learning maharah, divided into 4 types of competencies that students must have, namely: muharahmuhadatsah (speaking competence), maharahkitabah (writing competence), maharahqiro'ah (reading competence), as well as maharahistima' (listening competence) (Salshabila

et al., 2020). With the high level of competency expected, a student must adopt entrenched habits on how to facilitate mastery of Arabic vocabulary. The data obtained shows that an average of 80% of Indonesian students who are able to study in Tunisia are students on scholarships to study abroad. Through many stages, such as selection of foreign language skills according to the target campus. Furthermore, with various selections it gives students enthusiasm to learn Arabic.

The level of Arabic language mastery among Indonesian students who take part in the study is still low, so the practice-based Arabic language learning pattern emphasizes 4 (four) competencies that must be mastered starting from speaking, writing, reading, and listening competencies that must be mastered. *“Habitual practice is carried out by lecturers with a systematic curriculum so that students have more direct practice with peers to express Arabic, starting from the ability to write, read, listen and, more importantly, speak.”* *“With 4 (four) stages carried out, the main competencies that students must have, with systematic topics that provide more motivation for student learning with clear, unambiguous provisions, a floating curriculum.”* *“Cultural appreciation from learning Arabic, namely by implementing many daily activities that are translated into Arabic to increase the vocabulary of the Arabic language.”* Arabic language learning is carried out systematically by prioritizing a form of cultural appreciation with competency stages that must be mastered.

Hearing competency is a learning material that students must master, with the aim of training students to understand Arabic by regularly practicing listening (istima'). The learning process is carried out face to face using audio media as well as from the lecturer's explanations with attention to correct understanding, (Salshabila et al., 2020). Audio facilities have been provided in the room permanently so that it is easier to repeat the audio over and over again so that with the facilities that have been provided, students can get used to hearing Arabic conversations more often. Apart from that, outside of hours learning Arabic istima' can be done more easily for Indonesian students with the audio facilities provided by the campus. Apart from that, also through internet social media to support practical tasks in increasing the intensity in mastering listening competencies. Then the lecturer also stated that:

“Istima' learning is carried out using repeated audio media so that Indonesian students can learn optimally with the facilitated media, apart from hearing from the conversations of native Tunisian students who are fluent in Arabic accent, so they can learn directly with their peers.” Students also stated that: *“Audio media provides a very significant effect in increasing understanding and habituation in repeated listening.”*

One of the weaknesses of the istima' Arabic language learning stage is that there is a low level of question-and-answer interaction with the lecturer, because there is a lot of listening to material delivered audio. With a very long duration of time, the question-and-answer process carried out by the lecturer was very little in deepening the istima' material. So, it is more effective to use repeated audio media or internet media that is appropriate to the Arabic language learning material (istima').

Speaking competency (muhadatsah) is a quick technique for mastering Arabic because speaking brings up many skills that need to be translated into Arabic. The learning process carried out is using the mubasyir method, where the lecturer carries out more Arabic language communication activities between the lecturer and students directly. The methods used include group work with dialogue activities with colleagues, apart from that, presentations are carried out either directly or by submitting recorded videos to submit muhadatsah assignments. Learning to speak is carried out as mandatory communication in the lecture room. The lecturer means that:

“The learning process is carried out with a lot of practice where students use dialogue techniques or present Arabic language material either in groups or independently.” From the students' opinion that: *“The dialogue process is carried out by using a practical method, namely practicing with peers to provide mental support and strengthen the understanding that has been memorized.”*

Reading competency or qiro'ah is a technique for increasing understanding of the content and values contained in words or sentences. With reading competence, students are expected to be able to improve in terms of understanding and be more understanding in conveying the results of what they read, this is not related to just seeing the writing directly, (Mursyid, 2013). Students think about reading habits in improving Arabic language competence, namely:

“Students and lecturers study various Arabic language materials which are then carried out by summarizing several writings which are then presented in a presentation so that they are studied together with lecturers and students. Apart from this technique, it also expands the vocabulary acquired.” With adequate library facilities and lots of Arabic language studies to discuss, students are very free to practice reading competence fluently in standard Arabic.

Competence in writing or kitabah is the process of learning appropriate Arabic writing rules. This lesson is carried out by collaborating theory with practice. The aim of kitabah competency is the ability to explain what is read, heard, or the results of a conversation in the form of Arabic text (Salshabila et al., 2020). With this technique, students are more complex and simpler because they only use simple media, namely using paper, markers, and reading books or phenomena that are observed directly using correct Arabic writing rules. Students think about experiences in improving writing competence, namely: *“Many students are invited to the library to study various Arabic reading books, material books or Arabic novels, as well as carry out summaries written in Arabic writing in accordance with the rules, which are then confirmed by lecturers who teach systematically and flexibly.”*

Where writing culture is highly recommended for every student in order to facilitate and increase fluency in writing Arabic texts, apart from that, with Arabic writing competence students are able to write manually on paper and are able to write digitally on social media.

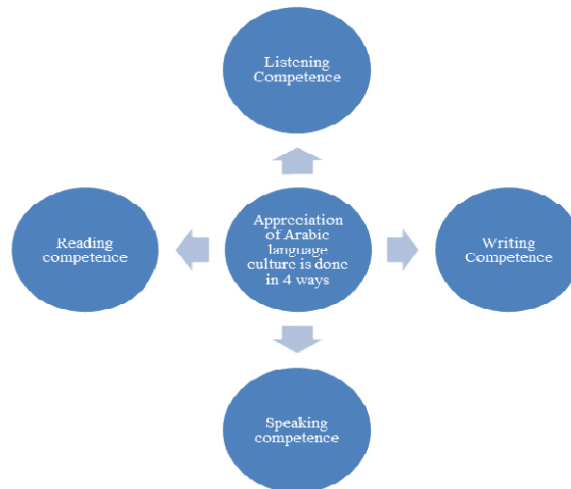


Figure 1. Appreciation of Arabic language culture is done in 4 ways

Fig. 1 illustrates the cultural appreciation in learning Arabic, which is a very complex and systematic unit where in cultivating Arabic language competence there are 4 (four) main stages that each student carries out in determining learning success, namely the habituation of the ability to listen, write, read, and speak. These four main competencies are the learning stages that really determine success in mastering Arabic language competencies carried out at socially good and right. If one of the components of Arabic language learning is missing for example in competency reading or other competencies have a significant impact on the fluency in mastering the four Arabic language competencies that must be mastered. By implementing learning there, Indonesian students get very adequate facilities and a very effective and innovative learning process so that they easily accept the learning process, and these steps really have a big impact on learning Arabic.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian students who pursue further studies in Arabic in Tunisia undergo a transformative experience that enriches their language proficiency and cultural understanding. Learning Arabic encompasses fundamental skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are honed through immersion in overseas campuses. This cultural immersion accelerates comprehension and fosters a mindset conducive to understanding and memorization. Such experiences offer valuable insights for Indonesian students studying foreign languages, particularly Arabic. The exposure gained abroad empowers students to appreciate the significance of Arabic language acquisition, which extends beyond mere linguistic competence to encompass cultural appreciation and individual character formation. This proficiency proves invaluable for everyday communication and for delving deeper into the study of the Quran and Hadith. Consequently, the imperative of learning Arabic in contemporary development is underscored, especially given the prevalent apathy towards foreign language proficiency among the youth. For future research, an exploration into the efficacy of different teaching methodologies and cultural integration strategies in enhancing Arabic language acquisition among Indonesian students would be beneficial. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of Arabic language proficiency on career opportunities and personal development could provide valuable insights for educational policymakers and practitioners.

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