

The Use of Arabic Language and Its Correlation with Religious Knowledge Understanding among Islamic Studies Students

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ABSTRACT

Proficiency in Arabic is necessary to engage directly with the Qur'ānic, ḥadīth, and traditional legal sources. Many Malaysian students pursuing Islamic Studies, however, lack the necessary skills to comprehend these materials completely. This study examines the connection between the frequency and context of Arabic use and students' perceived understanding and trust in basic religious topics. A composite instrument including the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.816$), the Multilingual Language Use Questionnaire, and the Attitude–Motivation Test Battery was used to administer a cross-sectional survey to 69 Islamic Studies majors at Universiti Teknologi MARA. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were calculated using SPSS. Students reported utilising Arabic for independent note-taking most of the time, but only seldom for spontaneous peer interactions or extracurricular media. The moderate mean scores for real-time lecture comprehension ($M = 3.26$) and expected examination performance ($M = 3.04$), despite the relatively strong motivation to develop Arabic abilities ($M = 3.77$), may indicate a mismatch between affective and cognitive components. Overall engagement was negatively correlated with limited comprehension during lectures, whereas academic Arabic use, particularly when taking notes, was a strong predictor of confidence in receiving excellent grades ($r = .74$, $p < .001$). In addition to highlighting fragmented rather than integrated language use as a barrier to deeper understanding, the findings underscore the necessity of communicative, content-based Arabic training that incorporates actual discourse throughout the curriculum.

Keywords: Islamic Studies, Arabic language usage, Malaysia, language competency, and comprehension of religious information.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is a language that has not been used as a communication tool. It also plays a significant role in the fundamental study of Islam, as well as a medium through which revelation was received and preserved. In Islamic studies, Arabic serves as a medium of linguistic engagement that directly interacts with the Quran, tafsir texts, hadith, and other legal texts, many of which have not been fully translated or have lost subtle meanings in translation. Arabic in the context of Islamic education is more than a linguistic tool. As the language of the Qur'an and Sunnah, Arabic holds a central role in the epistemology of Islamic education. Therefore, to understand and analyse Islamic knowledge with greater accuracy, it is essential for students to critically master the Arabic language. Among the purposes of learning Arabic are to understand the content of the Quran, Hadith, and other Islamic studies, and to know other Arabic terms used in various fields of knowledge (Ku et al., 2019).

Although Islamic studies can be understood by reading any sources in Malay, it is not certain that it can guarantee the true meaning of the word, especially the old Arabic terms that are retained in Malay writing. This retention may be because the terms have become common speech in the Malay community or because they are difficult to translate into Malay. Understanding Arabic is highly beneficial for students in understanding all sources

because many Islamic books are also written in Arabic (A. Fajar, 2022). Thus, Arabic plays a very important role in Islamic studies.

Arabic language studies have developed as it is considered a second language learned by Malaysians. Within most higher education institutions, Arabic is taught both as an independent language subject and as the primary medium of instruction, as well as content delivery for Islamic studies. In fact, students in the Islamic Studies programs at higher education institutions in Malaysia are compulsory to take the Arabic language subject as part of their course structure. In Malaysian universities, particularly for Islamic Studies programs, Arabic is used to teach foundational religious subjects such as fiqh, tafsir, and hadith. However, challenges persist where, despite students receiving years of formal Arabic language education, their ability to use the language to understand religious concepts remains limited (Abdullah et al., 2017). This gap can be attributed to several factors, including a lack of exposure to authentic texts, traditional teaching methods, and low student motivation.

Studies reported that many students have limited ability to use Arabic actively, both in reading and writing, and religious contexts indirectly restrict their comprehension of core Islamic studies. Although Arabic is one of the languages used in Islamic studies, many students, especially from non-Arabic-speaking countries, struggle to comprehend religious texts due to limited language used beyond the classroom. Moreover, interactive and digital teaching methods have been proposed to boost Arabic proficiency among students, but these methods largely emphasize language skills rather than linking the usage of Arabic to cognitive understanding of religious content (Ijlal et al., 2025). Students frequently remain at a moderate level when it comes to Arabic reading comprehension and struggle to understand religious texts despite formal instruction (Nur Fatanah Mat Noor et al., 2025). This shows that empirical studies examining the correlation between using the Arabic language frequently and students' understanding of religious knowledge are important to see Arabic proficiency rather than usage behaviours.

Despite recognizing the importance of learning Arabic in accessing Islamic Studies, most students lack confidence in using Arabic, especially when they are presenting or answering questions from lecturers. Studies indicate that teaching approaches are largely grammar-centred and fail to encourage students to speak in Arabic, which may explain the disconnect between proficiency and comprehension (Al Muslim M., 2018). Few previous studies have empirically explored how the frequency and context of Arabic language use correlate with students' understanding of religious knowledge. This kind of research is crucial in identifying not only students' level of Arabic language proficiency, but also in considering how active mastery of the language can enhance their academic understanding of Islamic studies.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the relationship between students' confidence in the usage of the Arabic language and the understanding of religious knowledge among Islamic Studies students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). By identifying the role of Arabic usage in shaping students' religious knowledge acquisition, this study provides valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in Islamic higher education. It advocates for instructional practices that go beyond traditional rote learning and grammar drills, encouraging the integration of Arabic in meaningful, context-driven academic and religious settings. This study was conducted based on two identified objectives:

- i. To measure Islamic Studies students' Arabic usage frequency and context.
- ii. To evaluate students' confidence in using Arabic and their perceived academic performance in religious studies.

The Importance Of Arabic In Islamic Education

Mastering the Arabic language is essential in comprehending the Islamic teaching, as mentioned in the Quran, "we have made it, a Quran in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand and learn wisdom" (Surah al-Zukhruf, 3). This verse emphasises the importance of Arabic as the medium of revelation, highlighting the language's vital role in grasping the breadth and depths of Islamic teachings. Additionally, with many Islamic sources such as the Quran, hadith, and scholarly commentaries originally written in Arabic, this makes learning the language becomes crucial for a deeper and more accurate understanding of these texts. As stated by Mat and Wan Abas

(2016), mastering the Arabic language is seen by scholars as a necessary step in Islamic learning as it enables individuals to accurately interpret the meanings conveyed in the Quran and Sunnah, especially in the context of Islamic jurisprudence. Mohamad Baharin et al. (2025) also add that fluency in Arabic is essential for effective Quranic memorisation and recitation as it requires a deep understanding of the language's morphology, grammar, and phonetics. Albirini et al. (2016) emphasized that Arabic is more than just a tool for communication; it is central to religious comprehension. Students who understand Arabic tend to grasp the meanings of Islamic teachings more deeply, especially when dealing with sources like the Quran and classical jurisprudence.

Moreover, having a good Arabic proficiency is considered a fundamental key to effectively engaging with Islamic educational content at the tertiary level. For instance, a study by Shabib Mosleet Alsubaie (2022) reveals that students who are proficient in Arabic find it easier to engage with Quranic content, Hadith, and classical scholarly works covered in their studies, whereas those without such skills may struggle to understand the core materials. Alhirtani (2019), in a study involving non-native Arabic speakers at the University of Malaya, found that Arabic grammar and vocabulary knowledge were strong predictors of success in subjects such as Fiqh and Tafsir. However, many students still require translation into their native language to fully understand texts, which reflects one of the key issues in Arabic-based instruction. Over 90% of students at Open University Malaysia agreed that learning Arabic helped them understand Islamic teachings better. It appears that Arabic instruction is tied directly to religious subjects; students are more engaged and perform better (Hamidah et al., 2016). This supports the integration of language and content in curriculum development.

In addition, the concept of narrow reading is introduced, which is focused on exposure to Arabic religious texts to help Islamic Studies students improve their reading efficiency and comprehension. This technique reinforces religious vocabulary and improves understanding over time (Mustapa et al., 2025). Likewise, Azeez et al. (2025) found a clear positive correlation between Arabic language competence and comprehension of Islamic knowledge among secondary school students, showing that this connection begins even at the early educational stages. Translations often fall short of capturing the full depth of Islamic teachings. Thus, understanding Arabic directly is essential for correct interpretation (Khoerudin et al., 2024). Essentially, the Arabic language continues to play a crucial role as the language of religion and the unifying language of the Arab and Islamic world, contributing not only to the advancement of Islamic studies but also to the progress of science and civilization (Arwani, 2017).

Students' Confidence in Using Arabic

Confidence refers to a person's positive attitude toward their own abilities, allowing them to act without excessive anxiety, freely engage in activities they enjoy, take responsibility for their actions, interact with others warmly and respectfully, strive for excellence, and be aware of both their strengths and weaknesses (Nety et al., 2020). Nonetheless, it is essential to recognise that various factors or situations can diminish students' learning confidence. In a study by Ismail et al. (2020), students were observed to experience anxiety and fear when speaking Arabic, particularly during oral examinations, due to their difficulty in organising and delivering their speech accurately and with confidence. Furthermore, Mohd Nor Be et al. (2024) also reveal that there is a significant correlation between students' readiness to communicate in Arabic and the barriers they face, which include shyness, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary. Arabic proficiency not only supports academic success but also contributes to moral and spiritual development. University students in Saudi Arabia who were proficient in Arabic showed higher levels of religious identity, confidence in Islamic discussions, and motivation to improve further (Alsubaie et al., 2022).

Sekarsari et al. (2024) emphasized that Arabic not only aids learning but also strengthens students' religious identity and values in Islamic schools. Despite the advantages, some challenges persist. Arifin et al. (2024) identified several barriers in Arabic language learning, such as low motivation, limited materials, and fear of making mistakes. To overcome these obstacles, Sdawi et al. (2025) proposed interdisciplinary teaching, where Arabic is taught alongside religious content to enhance both language and subject matter comprehension.

In addition, challenges faced by students in learning Arabic can be categorised into two primary sources, namely the internal factors and environmental factors. Internal factors refer to personal elements within the students that

hinder their involvement with the Arabic language, while environmental factors are external influences from the students' surroundings that affect their learning and language use (Mohd Rushdi & Asbulah, 2023). It is important to recognise that each student has unique traits, where some are outgoing and self-assured, while others are more reserved, which result in diverse learning preferences; therefore, teachers should adopt a range of teaching strategies to enhance and sustain students' motivation (Nat, 2022).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in a comprehensive theoretical framework that incorporates various theories from psychology and second language acquisition to explain the fundamental concepts explored, including language learning anxiety, academic self-efficacy, multilingual language use, attitude and motivation, as well as reading strategies.

Firstly, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) provides the foundation for understanding academic self-efficacy and the use of cognitive strategies. It explains how human behaviour is largely driven and controlled by the continuous application of self-regulation and personal influence (Bandura, 1991). Hence, the adoption of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1992) helps to uncover this aspect. According to Schwarzer et al. (1995), the scale evaluates how strongly an individual believes in their ability to handle new or challenging situations and overcome any related difficulties or setbacks. Similarly, the use of reading strategies by Li's (2013) cross-linguistic study also aligns with Bandura's notion of self-regulated learning and strategic behaviour.

Secondly, the Usage-Based Model of Language Learning supports the inclusion of language use frequency as a key variable. It emphasises that language learning occurs through active participation in interpersonal communication and cognitive activities (Javadi & Kazemirad, 2020). Thus, the Multilingual Language Use Questionnaire by Li et al. (2013) used in this study reflects the frequency and context of language use in real-life communication.

Finally, the Gardner's Socia-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition (1985) highlights the constructs of motivation and attitude. This model underlines that second language acquisition occurs in diverse contexts, and the learner's cultural background is a key factor that shapes the learning environment and can significantly influence their motivation to learn the language (Lovato, 2011). Hence, the Attitude-Motivation Test Battery by Gardner (1985) is utilised in this study to reflect the various dimensions of motivation by assessing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

When combined, these complementary theories and assessment tools provide a strong analytical framework that enables a nuanced analysis of the ways in which self-belief, usage patterns, and motivational orientations influence Arabic-language engagement and perceived academic outcomes among students studying Islamic Studies.

Research Design

In this study, a questionnaire was used as the primary instrument to measure the frequency and context of Arabic usage among students of Islamic Studies at UiTM. Additionally, the study aimed to evaluate students' confidence in their ability to use Arabic and their perceived academic performance in religious studies. The research design and methodology utilised a quantitative research approach. Through the utilisation of a descriptive technique, the study objectives were successfully accomplished. To statistically measure the frequency, correlation, and context of Arabic usage among students of Islamic Studies, as well as to evaluate students' confidence in using Arabic and their perceived academic performance in religious studies, data collection and analysis were made possible through the process of using an online platform, specifically Google Form.

Research Instruments

This study employed primary data collected via a structured questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire was utilised to assess the frequency and context of Arabic usage among Islamic Studies students,

as well as to evaluate their confidence in using Arabic and their perceived academic performance in religious studies. within the UiTM student population. The questionnaire employed in this study was adapted from a structured instrument developed by the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1), the Multilingual Language Use Questionnaire (Li et al., 2013), and the Attitude–Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985). The methodology was modified and enhanced to align with the specific needs of the current research. The questionnaire consisted of 8 questions designed to assess the frequency and context of Arabic usage among Islamic Studies students, as well as to evaluate their confidence in using Arabic and their perceived academic performance in religious studies. within the student body of UiTM.

The questionnaire items were evaluated using a Likert Scale, allowing students to choose from the following responses: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. Before initiating the main study, researchers conducted a pilot test to evaluate the reliability of the research instrument, even though it had previously been validated by experts. The primary research instrument was pilot tested with a sample of 10 UiTM students. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient was utilised to assess the reliability of the research instrument and its eight questionnaire items. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient obtained was 0.816, demonstrating that the developed instrument is reliable and appropriate for the data collection phase of the research.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.816	8

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers utilised appropriate statistical instruments for data collection to achieve the research objectives. Following the selection and piloting of the instrument, the results demonstrated the acceptability of the questions. The questionnaire was subsequently distributed to students at the end of the semester. The responses of the participants to the questionnaire constituted primary data for statistical analysis. The questionnaire employed a Likert scale, offering response options from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), including Agree (4), Neutral (3), and Disagree (2). The data collected through Google Forms was subjected to screening, cleaning, and subsequently transferred to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Statistical analysis was performed on the scores of the eight questionnaire items, which included summing the scores and calculating their frequency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from a questionnaire. Sixty-nine participants participated in this survey to gather the required information. The study involved 25 male and 44 female students from UiTM campuses in Samarahan, Kuala Pilah, and Dungun. These students are pursuing a major in Islamic Studies. The participants responded to eight questions designed to assess their frequency of Arabic usage, their confidence in using Arabic, and their perceived academic performance in religious studies. The following data were obtained from the questionnaire:

No. of Question	Item	Mean	Std Deviation
Q2	I frequently use Arabic when discussing religious topics with my classmates.	2.39	1.07
Q3	I am able to take lecture notes in Arabic accurately and neatly.	2.88	1.17
Q6	Outside of class, I watch or listen to religious lectures in Arabic to strengthen my Arabic proficiency.	2.55	1.07

Table 1: Arabic usage frequency

Sixty-nine undergraduate students in Islamic Studies completed all three items measuring their frequency of Arabic usage in various academic contexts. Item-level inspection (Table 1) indicates a moderate engagement pattern rather than widespread daily use. Students indicated the highest frequency for "taking lecture notes in Arabic accurately and neatly" (SD = 1.17), implying that written academic tasks are the primary context for the

use of Arabic. Conversely, the item measuring spontaneous peer interaction, “I frequently use Arabic when discussing religious topics with my classmates” ($SD = 1.07$), exhibited the lowest mean, suggesting that informal oral communication in Arabic is relatively uncommon among a significant portion of the cohort. Engagement with extracurricular Arabic media, as indicated by the statement “I watch or listen to religious lectures in Arabic outside class” (Q6), was found to occupy an intermediate position ($SD = 1.07$). This suggests that while there is some autonomous exposure, it has not yet developed into a consistent learning strategy for a significant number of respondents.

No. of Question	Item	Mean	Stad Deviation
Q1	I am confident in understanding the lecture content presented in Arabic.	3.26	1.05
Q8	I am highly motivated to continue improving my Arabic skills for my religious studies.	3.77	0.96

Table 2: Confidence in using Arabic

The descriptive analysis of the two items reveals that the group of students exhibits strong motivation yet only moderate confidence in their Arabic proficiency for religious studies. In response to Q1 (“I am confident in understanding the lecture content presented in Arabic”), data from 69 participants indicated a mean score of 3.26 ($SD = 1.05$), suggesting that the average confidence level is relatively above neutral. The standard deviation, exceeding one scale unit, along with the complete range of responses, indicates significant variation in confidence levels. This shows that many students feel secure in Arabic-medium lectures but yet struggle to understand. In contrast, Q8 (“I am highly motivated to continue improving my Arabic skills for my religious studies”) yielded a mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.96, suggesting a more consistent and positive motivational orientation. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the item, indicating a broad commitment to language development. These findings indicate a student group characterised by high motivation and varying levels of confidence, highlighting the necessity for pedagogical strategies that enhance understanding and bolster self-efficacy.

No. of Question	Item	Mean	Std Deviation
Q4	When reading Arabic texts, I need to translate them into Malay first to truly understand them.	4.16	1.04
Q5	I feel that mastering Arabic enhances my understanding of religious concepts.	3.71	0.96
Q7	I am confident that I can achieve high marks in exams for religious subjects taught in Arabic.	3.04	1.18

Table 3: Perceived academic performance in religious studies

The results of the survey about how students feel about academic performance in Arabic-speaking contexts show a generally good but inconsistent trend. Q4 (“When reading Arabic texts, I need to translate them into Malay first to truly understand them”) had the highest mean score (4.16, $SD = 1.04$), indicating a strong tendency among respondents to rely on translation into Malay as a primary reading strategy. This pattern suggests limited direct receptive processing of Arabic (lexical, morphological, and syntactic decoding), and it implies that comprehension currently depends on mediation rather than immediate understanding in the target language. Q5 (“Mastering Arabic enhances my understanding of religious concepts”) got an average score of 3.71 ($SD = 0.96$), which means that most people thought that knowing Arabic made it easier to grasp religious topics. There wasn't much difference in the answers. But others weren't as sure about how well they would do on the test. Q7 (“I am confident of getting high marks in Arabic-taught religious exams”) had a mean of 3.04 ($SD = 1.18$), which shows moderate confidence and the most variation across the items. This suggests that people had quite different expectations about how well they would do on the exams. The results show how important it is to give students support that focuses on assessment so they can use the academic abilities they learn in class in challenging circumstances.

The frequency of Arabic use and students' perceived academic performance and confidence are strongly statistically significantly correlated, according to the correlation analysis. In particular, there is a strong correlation between Q3 (taking notes) and Q7 ($r = .738$, $p < .001$), indicating that students who frequently use Arabic in academic writing situations are more likely to feel confident about producing quality work. Additionally, there are moderate to strong correlations between Arabic usage variables (Q2, Q6) and motivation (Q8), suggesting that consistent use fosters positive attitudes. On the other hand, Q4 (real-time comprehension) exhibits negative correlations with the majority of items, suggesting that students who struggle to comprehend lectures might be less active or self-regulatory. This result emphasises the necessity of focused instructional support.

CONCLUSION

Two specific goals were pursued in this study: (1) to gauge the frequency of Arabic usage by Islamic Studies students and the contexts in which it occurs, and (2) to assess their academic performance in Arabic-medium religious studies as well as their confidence in using Arabic. The results clearly matched both objectives. Arabic has not yet become a ubiquitous communicative norm, as evidenced by Objective 1, which found that Arabic is most frequently used for note-taking, an individual, cognitively mediated activity, while spontaneous oral interaction and extracurricular media engagement are only moderate. Affective-cognitive asymmetry was demonstrated by Objective 2: while motivation to learn Arabic is consistently high, confidence in understanding lectures in real time and, particularly, expectations of passing exams are more erratic. Together, these findings provide a complex picture of a cohort that uses Arabic episodically rather than holistically and is driven but unevenly self-efficacious.

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