

Factors Influencing Arabic Language Subject Achievement Among Students of Government-Aided Religious Schools (Sabk) in Kota Setar District

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dominant factors influencing Arabic language achievement among students in Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK) in the Kota Setar District, Kedah. As Arabic is central to religious knowledge and scholarly communication, students' performance reflects the overall effectiveness of Islamic education. Using a qualitative design with an interpretive phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Form Four students identified as high achievers in Arabic. The study is guided by Al-Ghazali's Human Development Theory, which emphasizes balanced spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual growth, supported by Self-Regulated Learning Theory to understand students' motivation and learning strategies. Thematic analysis revealed three key dimensions: student character, learning strategies, and peer dynamics. Findings show that personal character such as discipline, academic integrity, and spiritual sincerity drives intrinsic motivation to master Arabic. Self-directed learning strategies, including structured study plans, digital learning tools, and effective time management, further enhance proficiency. Peer influence functions in a dual way: supportive peers improve understanding through collaboration, while negative attitudes can reduce confidence and trigger language anxiety. Overall, the study highlights that Arabic achievement depends on the interplay of internal factors (character and spiritual motivation) and external factors (social support and learning environment). It recommends that SABK schools strengthen character development and social support within the curriculum to promote holistic student excellence aligned with Islamic educational philosophy.

Keywords: Personality, Learning Strategies; Peer Influence; Arabic Achievement; SABK; Al- Ghazali's Theory

Background of the study

The education system in Malaysia, based on the National Philosophy of Education (FPK), emphasizes the development of balanced human capital in terms of spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). In this context, Government Aided Religious Schools (SABK) are unique institutions established since 2004, aiming to improve the quality of education by integrating the national academic curriculum and the existing religious curriculum (Ibrahim et al., 2024). SABK plays a critical role in shaping a generation of knowledge and noble character.

Arabic as a core subject at SABK, is now recognized as an important international language. Although Arabic plays a role in the formation of noble values through the understanding of religious texts (Duryat, 2021), students' performance in these subjects shows an inconsistent pattern. The main challenges include difficulty in mastering grammar and weakness in speaking skills, which ultimately affect students' self-confidence.

The formation of a student's personality is the main pillar of academic excellence. Traits such as self-discipline, responsibility, and integrity directly affect a student's ability to concentrate, manage time, and master complex language skills. Therefore, the strengthening of personality elements, a conducive learning environment, and positive peer interaction are seen as important factors in overcoming contemporary learning barriers and improving achievement in the Arabic Language. This study was conducted to identify the main factors influencing the achievement of Arabic language subjects among SABK students in the district of Kota Setar.

Statement of the problem

Although the Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK) in the Kota Setar District are equipped with a comprehensive curriculum and qualified instructors, the achievement of students in Arabic subjects shows a worrying trend. Based on the exam performance report, there has been a significant decline in the mastery of basic Arabic language skills, particularly in the grammatical and communication aspects, which has not yet reached the expected level (Baba et al., 2021). This phenomenon highlights the existence of a large gap between theoretical mastery and students' ability to apply the language in real-life contexts.

This problem is further exacerbated by a variety of challenging environmental and social factors. Among them is the lack of institutional support, especially in terms of learning facilities such as language labs and limited authentic materials, which in turn makes it difficult to implement effective teaching and learning processes. In addition, the negative influence of peers also has a significant impact on students' motivation and confidence. Mocking or belittling friends who try to use Arabic in daily communication is an obstacle to the formation of a conducive and authentic language environment (Fadzil et al., 2022).

Furthermore, while personality aspects are often linked to students' academic success, the lack of empirical evidence that specifically examines the relationship between personality elements such as self-discipline, responsibility and integrity with Arabic language achievement in the context of SABK in Kota Setar remains a constraint. Therefore, a comprehensive study is needed to detail the factors that influence Arabic language achievement among SABK students. The findings from this study are expected to provide a clearer picture and become a basis for schools and educators to formulate more effective and high-impact improvement strategies.

Study Objectives and Questions

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Personality and Academic Achievement

The academic literature consistently points to the role of personality as a key determinant of academic success. Within this framework, personality is divided into three critical elements:

Self Discipline

High self-discipline allows students to manage their time efficiently and maintain focus on academic tasks. In learning Arabic, this self-discipline translates into consistency in memorizing vocabulary, repeating grammar studies, and performing skills training continuously.

Responsibility

Academic responsibility encourages better commitment to assignment preparation and active involvement in learning. Responsible students not only complete assignments, but also take the initiative on their own to find additional reference materials and correct mistakes, which have been shown to improve problem-solving skills.

Integrity

Integrity refers to academic honesty and sincerity in seeking knowledge. Students with integrity in Arabic will avoid shortcuts such as automatic translation and strive to understand language concepts in depth. This practice ensures a more solid understanding and more authentic language skills

The Role of the Learning Environment

A conducive learning environment at SABK plays an important role in motivating and influencing Arabic language achievement. A positive environment involves three main aspects:

Physical Environment: The availability of facilities such as language labs, libraries, and adequate teaching technology has been proven to increase students' interest and achievement. This lack of facilities is seen as a major constraint faced by many SABKs.

Social Environment: Positive interaction between teachers and students and effective administrative support can form a school culture that promotes character development.

Institutional Environment: A clear school policy in the development of the school's language and culture that encourages the use of Arabic in daily communication contributes to the formation of a more effective environment.

Peer Influence

Peers are powerful socialization agents in the formation of students' identities and behaviors (Tang & Amir, 2024). These influences can be bilateral:

Positive Support: Peers who provide academic support, through group learning and note-sharing, have been shown to improve students' academic achievement and interpersonal skills.

Negative Influences: On the other hand, negative peer pressure can damage personality and motivation, especially if social groups underestimate the importance of learning Arabic or prevent the use of the language in social interactions.

Study Challenges and Gaps

Although Government Aided Religious Schools (SABK) play a critical role in shaping the personality of students, various challenges still exist such as high teacher workload, physical infrastructure constraints and negative influences of social media (Ismail & Othman, 2020; Ab Halim & Muslaini, 2018). Based on the literature review, three main study gaps were identified as justifications for the conduct of this study. First, most studies related to Arabic language achievement focus more on pedagogical aspects and teaching methods, with limited research on the role of personality elements such as self-discipline, responsibility and integrity. Second, there is still a lack of research that focuses on the uniqueness of the context of SABK that combines elements of religious and academic education, as well as its impact on Arabic language proficiency. Third, there is a lack of comprehensive studies in integrating and testing the relationship between personality, environment and peer variables collectively in a specific study framework, especially in the Kota Setar area.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the factors influencing Arabic language achievement through the students' own experiential perspectives. Specifically, this study utilizes the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) to deeply explore how high-achieving students make sense of and experience the influence of personal character, environment, and peers in the context of Arabic language learning in SABK.. The main data collection method used was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for the flexible and detailed exploration of aspects of personality, environment, and peer influence (Radi & Amran, 2023).

Study Location, Population and Sample

The study was conducted at two selected Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK) in the Kota Setar

District, Kedah: Maktab Mahmud Pokok Sena and Sekolah Menengah Agama Darussaadah. The selection of these two sites was intended to allow for site triangulation and comparison of contextual experiences, thus enhancing the depth and richness of the qualitative data.

Purposive sampling was used to select **12 Form 4 students** as study participants. The sample selection criteria were as follows:

- Students who take Arabic subjects.
- The sample was equally divided between **high-achieving students** (scores of 80% and above) and **medium-achieving students** (scores between 50-79%), with six students in each category. This division aimed to achieve **maximum variation** in the data to understand a broad spectrum of experiences in the context of Arabic language learning.
- Students are active in Arabic co-curricular activities and have been attending the SABK for at least three years.

The sample size of 12 participants was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, in line with practice in qualitative research to obtain in-depth data.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The main instrument used is the semi-structured interview protocol. Interview questions were developed based on the three main themes of the study (personality, environment, peers) supported by a literature review.

The data collection process involves:

- Obtaining ethical permission from the school administration and written consent from the participants.
- Conducting face-to-face interview sessions (45–60 minutes per session) in a convenient location, recorded using a digital audio recorder, and supported by field notes.
- The data collection process was carried out continuously for three months (March–May 2025).

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis methods (Sitasari, 2022).

The process is systematic and ongoing, involving the following steps:

- Transcription of interview recordings.
- Open Coding (identification of meaningful units in the data).
- Categorization of codes according to equations.
- Formation The main theme that answers the study problem.

ATLAS.ti software is used to assist in the systematic management, coding, and analysis of data.

Validity and Reliability

The credibility and reliability of these qualitative studies are ensured through several strategies:

- **Data Triangulation:** Collection of data from multiple sources (two SABKs, two groups of achievements).
- **Expert Confirmation:** The interview protocol was reviewed by three experts (two Arabic/Islamic Education lecturers with more than 10 years of experience and one excellent Arabic teacher) to ensure the validity of the face and content.
- **Participant Validation:** Transcripts and preliminary interpretations were shared with study participants for validation and feedback, thus improving the accuracy of the findings.
- **Audit Trail:** Detailed documentation of the investigation process, including transcripts, notes, and the

coding process, is kept transparently.

Research Ethics

The ethical aspect is given absolute priority. Each participant was given a detailed description of the purpose of the study and their rights, including the guarantee of confidentiality of identity (use of pseudonyms), voluntariness of participation, and the storage of secure data (password protected) before being disposed of after the stipulated period.

Study Findings

Identification

This chapter presents the findings of the study obtained through in-depth interviews with 12 Form 4 students from two Government-Aided Religious Schools (SABK) in the district of Kota Setar, Kedah. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach based on three main objectives, namely identifying personality elements, exploring environmental influences, and exploring peer influence on Arabic subject achievement. Each objective is accompanied by a diagram of themes and subthemes, detailed descriptions and relevant interview excerpts to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors influencing student achievement.

Demographics of Study Participants

The study involved 12 participants consisting of six students from Mahmud Pokok Sena College and six students from Sekolah Menengah Agama Darussaadah, comprising six high-performing students (scores of 80% and above) and six medium-performing students (scores between 50–79%). All participants are active in Arabic co-curricular activities and have at least three years of experience studying at SABK, thus providing a diverse and in-depth perspective on the learning environment and school culture in the context of Islamic education in Malaysia.

Personality Elements That Influence Arabic Language Achievement

The findings of the study show that the personality element plays an important role in determining the Arabic language achievement of SABK students. Four main themes were identified, namely Discipline and Self-Management, Academic Integrity and Honesty, Learning Responsibility and Commitment, and Internal Motivation and Diligence.

The findings of the study identified four main themes that form the basis of students' personality, namely Discipline and Self-Management, Academic Integrity and Honesty, Learning Responsibility and Commitment, and Internal Motivation and Diligence. Under the first theme, aspects such as time management, consistent daily practices, and self-control are identified as important factors in improving academic performance. The second theme emphasizes the value of honesty with oneself and sincerity in learning as the foundation of academic integrity. Next, the third theme involves independence in learning, commitment to quality, as well as trust in assignments that reflect students' responsibility towards their learning process. Finally, the fourth theme highlights the role of self-awareness, reflection, and perseverance in facing challenges as a driver of students' intrinsic motivation to achieve excellence in learning Arabic.

Students who had high discipline in time management, daily practice, and self-control showed significant improvements in achievement, such as an increase in scores from 68 to 84 (Respondent 2). Academic integrity through honesty and sincerity in learning shows a positive relationship with meaningful learning progress, driven by spiritual values and intrinsic motivation.

A responsible and committed attitude is translated through independence, thoroughness, and trust in completing assignments, which drives improved academic performance. Meanwhile, inner motivation and perseverance help students face learning challenges with high self-awareness and reflection, as well as a strong spiritual spirit to continue to strive to understand Arabic in depth. In conclusion, students' personalities not only affect academic

performance but also form a positive, consistent and Islamic value-based learning attitude, in line with the educational goals at SABK.

Table 4.1 Themes and Sub-Themes of Personality Elements Influencing Arabic Language Achievement

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Findings (Interview Summary)	Source / Respondent
1. Discipline and Self-Management	1.1 Time management & study schedule	A systematic table increases the score from 68 → 84; A special time for memorization & practice.	R1, R2 (MMPS)
	1.2 Consistency & daily practice	Memorize 5 words a day, making it an effective daily routine for long-term memory.	R3, R7 (SMAD)
	1.3 Self-control & focus	Set a study time after Maghrib; Avoid distractions for the sake of focus and self-discipline.	R6 (MMPS)
2. Academic Integrity & Honesty	2.1 Honesty with yourself	Do not imitate the work of friends; asking when not understanding; improvement of learning outcomes.	R4, R8 (MMPS, SMAD)
	2.2 Sincerity in learning	Learn for the sake of Allah; Spiritual connection strengthens the intrinsic motivation and blessing of knowledge.	R1, R5 (SMAD, MMPS)
3. Learning Responsibilities & Commitments	3.1 Independence in learning	Focus in class, not depending on others; independent and disciplined.	R9 (SMAD)
	3.2 Commitment to quality	Checking for mistakes and rewriting exercises to reinforce understanding.	R11 (MMPS)
	3.3 Trust in assignment	Do not give up even if you fail; Watch videos and reread the material.	R11 (SMAD)
4. Internal Motivation & Perseverance	4.1 Self-awareness & reflection	Accept the teacher's reprimand, avoid studying at the end; Practice reflective learning.	R12, R4 (MMPS)
	4.2 Perseverance in the face of challenges	Associate learning with understanding the Quran; Develop an interest in continuing to learn.	R6 (MMPS)

Overall, these four personality elements complement each other in forming students who are disciplined, honest, responsible, and highly motivated, thus having a positive impact on their achievement in learning Arabic at SABK.

The Influence of Environment on the Arabic Language Achievement of SABK Students in Kota Setar

This study found that the learning, social and institutional environment plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of Arabic language learning among SABK students. A conducive environment with adequate facilities, continuous teacher support as well as the implementation of programmes and a school culture that emphasizes the practical use of Arabic has been proven to increase students' motivation and achievement. In terms of learning environment and facilities, a comfortable classroom atmosphere and the use of technology and interactive teaching aids help improve students' understanding and focus on learning Arabic. Meanwhile, aspects of the social environment and interaction also play an important role as an interactive teaching approach, continuous guidance and positive relationships between teachers and students build self-confidence and

encourage students' interest in continuing to learn. In the context of the institutional and programme environment, the involvement of students in extracurricular activities and school culture that encourages the use of Arabic in real-life situations forms more effective communication competence and language application. Overall, these findings show that a combination of a supportive physical, social, and institutional environment is capable of creating a holistic and effective learning environment, in line with Vygotsky's social learning theory and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach that emphasizes learning through interaction and real context.

Three main themes were identified namely (1) Learning Environment and Facilities, (2) Social Environment and Interaction, and (3) Institutional and Programme Environment. The first theme includes sub-themes of classroom atmosphere, learning facilities and technology, as well as teaching aids. The second theme involves teaching methods, teacher support, and teacher-student interaction. The third theme also includes programs and culture of using Arabic in schools.

Table 4.2 Analysis of Themes and Sub-Themes of Environmental Influence on Arabic Language Achievement

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Findings (Interview Summary)	Source / Respondent
Theme 1: Learning Environment and Facilities	1.1 Conducive classroom atmosphere	Calm & fun classes to help comprehension (R5, R8)	Affective factors affect motivation; A positive atmosphere reduces language annoyance.
	1.2 Learning facilities & technologies	The use of TikTok/YouTube videos helps with quick comprehension (R12)	Digital learning enriches language input and attracts the interest of generation Z.
	1.3 Teaching aids	Visual notes & file system to help learning management (R11)	Self-paced strategies demonstrate students' autonomy and self-study skills.
Theme 2: Social Environment and Interaction	2.1 Teacher's teaching methods	Confidence level oral questions and exercises (R7, R9)	An interactive approach (CLT) strengthens students' communication and retention skills.
	2.2 Teacher support and guidance	Teachers give extra classes & individual help (R6, R11)	A friendly teacher-student relationship creates emotional safety and high motivation.
	2.3 Teacher-student interaction	Caring and patient teachers help students understand (R10)	Positive interactions strengthen the social bonds & intrinsic drive of students.
Theme 3: Institutional and Program Environment	3.1 School programs & activities	Arabic language workshops, speeches, and fluency level competitions (R12, R5)	Co-curricular programs build authentic experiences and language confidence.
	3.2 Culture of Arabic use	"Arabic speaking day" level of actual language use (R3, R4)	Immersive environment is effective in second language acquisition; This practice should be expanded.

Overall, the three aspects of the environment (learning, social, institutional) complement each other in supporting the learning of Arabic as a whole. Findings show that students who study in a conducive environment, receive effective teacher guidance, and engage in Arabic-oriented programs show higher academic achievement as well

as strong intrinsic motivation.

Peer Influence on the Arabic Language Achievement of SABK Students in Kota Setar

Studies have found that peers have a significant influence on student achievement in Arabic subjects through three main dimensions: academic support, social interaction, and behavioral influence. In this context, peers are not only a source of learning aid, but also act as a catalyst for motivation and positive learning models. Collaborative learning such as mentor systems, study groups, and note-sharing help improve students' comprehension and communication skills. Additionally, social interactions in Arabic informally reinforce language proficiency through real applications, while hardworking and motivated friends inspire others. However, negative influences such as laziness, ridicule of language mistakes, and language anxiety are also challenges that need to be managed. Overall, peer influence is bi-directional in nature and can be a catalyst for success or a barrier to learning depending on the culture and attitudes within the group.

Three main themes were identified: Theme 1: Academic Support and Collaborative Learning, Theme 2: Social Interaction and Language Communication, and Theme 3: Influence of Behaviour and Attitudes. Under Theme 1, the sub-themes that emerge are peer mentoring systems, group learning, and sharing of learning resources. Theme 2 covers the use of Arabic in daily conversations as well as the role of friends as a source of motivation and inspiration. Meanwhile, Theme 3 highlights two different dimensions of peer influence, namely the positive impact on the formation of discipline and interest in learning, as well as the challenge of negative influences that can weaken students' focus and commitment.

Table 4.3 Themes and Sub-Themes of Peer Influence on Arabic Language Achievement

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Findings (Interview Summary)	Source / Respondent
Theme 1: Academic Support and Collaborative Learning	1.1 Peer Mentor System	Friends help explain nahu and soraf; Mentor-mentee groups exist spontaneously.	Peer tutoring improves comprehension through easy-to-understand language; demonstrate autonomy and collaborative awareness.
	1.2 Group and Collaborative Learning	Learning in a group makes learning fun and reduces stress; group leader rotating system.	Collaborative learning improves comprehension and reduces emotional stress; in line with the theory of affective filters.
	1.3 Sharing Learning Resources	Students share notes and techniques for answering questions.	The sharing of resources reflects a culture of helping and a collective responsibility to academic success.
Theme 2: Social Interaction and Language Communication	2.1 The Use of Arabic in Conversation	Students use Arabic words such as "ana", "anta", "ayna" in everyday conversation.	Spontaneous use and code-switching help natural language acquisition in informal contexts.
	2.2 Motivation and Inspiration of Friends	Friends are diligent in inspiring; quizzes and memorization together with the level of enthusiasm for learning.	The phenomenon of peer modeling encourages intrinsic motivation and forms a positive learning culture.
Theme 3: Influence of Behavior and	3.1 Positive	Speaking exercises with pronunciation and writing;	Positive peers form discipline, confidence, and consistency of

Attitude	Influence	Friends are diligent in encouraging review.	learning; long-term benefits to performance.
	3.2 Challenges and Negative Influences	Lazy, skipping friends, making fun of Arabic mistakes, there is shame and fear of being wrong.	Negative influences exist through language anxiety; The selection of positive peers is important for academic success.

Overall, the findings show that peer influence is a strong social factor in learning Arabic. Collaborative learning, active communication, and a culture of peer support can improve academic achievement, while negative attitudes and ridicule can affect students' confidence and motivation. Therefore, the formation of a positive peer-based learning community is very important to strengthen students' language proficiency and interest in Arabic.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Arabic language achievement at SABK is influenced by the complementary interaction between internal factors (personality such as discipline and sincerity) and external factors (conducive environment and peer support). Success depends on a holistic balance that emphasizes the development of noble values and effective learning strategies, in line with Al-Ghazali's Human Development Theory.

Study Limitations

This study was limited to Form 4 students and was conducted in only two SABK schools in the Kota Setar district. This limitation restricts the ability to generalize (generalizability) the findings to the entire population of SABK students across different zones and levels. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted as an in-depth exploration of the specific context of high and medium-achieving students in Kota Setar.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the study's limitations and findings, several recommendations for future research are as follows:

1. Scope Expansion and Generalizability:

Future studies are recommended to expand the study sample by involving students from various levels and different SABK zones to test the applicability and generalizability of these findings.

2. Personality-Based Intervention Studies (Internal Focus):

Quantitative intervention studies should be conducted to assess the direct impact of personality development modules on improving academic achievement, especially in Arabic subjects, given the key role of discipline and integrity found in the study.

3. Action Research to Address Negative Peer Influence (External Focus):

Further research needs to thoroughly examine the factors of peer unwillingness to communicate in Arabic.

Action Research is recommended to devise and test effective intervention strategies to reduce the language anxiety caused by negative peer influence and ridicule, which affects students' confidence and motivation.

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