

Perception of Students of the Faculty of Business Management on Learning Arabic as a Third Language

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ABSTRACT

Research on students' perceptions of learning Arabic as a third language is well established, but little attention has been given to non-language major students in Malaysian higher education, particularly in business faculties. This study investigates the perceptions of students from the Faculty of Business Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Mukah toward Arabic learning. A quantitative descriptive design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 50 students. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests to examine differences by gender and prior Arabic learning experience. The results show that most students expressed positive perceptions, with 67.8% of responses in the "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" categories. Nevertheless, challenges related to the complexity of Arabic grammar and limited opportunities for exposure continue to hinder effective learning. No significant differences were found between genders or between students with and without prior exposure. These findings suggest that teaching strategies and supportive learning environments are more influential than demographic factors in shaping positive perceptions of Arabic.

Keywords: Perception, Arabic, Third Language

INTRODUCTION

Arabic occupies a prominent position among global languages, not only because of its deep cultural and religious heritage but also due to its increasing relevance in education, commerce, and professional fields. In higher education, proficiency in Arabic remains vital for scholars engaging with Islamic literature and primary sources. However, its scope has broadened in recent years to include areas such as international business, diplomacy, and cross-cultural communication. Consequently, many universities particularly in Muslim-majority nations have introduced Arabic courses to strengthen students' linguistic and cultural competencies.

In the Malaysian context, Arabic is commonly offered as a third language across public universities. Although it is not a compulsory subject for most non-religious disciplines, many students continue to enrol in Arabic courses, recognising the language's intellectual, cultural, and professional value. At the same time, Arabic is not an easy language to pick up, and students' views toward learning it matter a great deal. Perceptions can influence motivation, the way students engage in class, and even their eventual achievement. Such perceptions

may relate to teaching approaches, classroom activities, available resources, or even how useful students think Arabic will

be in their studies and careers.

Although research on foreign language learning is extensive, there is less focus on students outside language and religious programs. Business students, for example, often approach Arabic with different motivations: to fulfill a degree requirement, to strengthen their résumé, or simply to broaden skills. These priorities are not always the same as those of language majors.

This study aims to look more closely at this particular group by exploring how Business Management students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Mukah perceive Arabic courses. The focus is on their experiences and challenges, with the hope of identifying what works and what does not. The findings are expected to provide useful guidance for lecturers, curriculum designers, and policy makers who want to make Arabic learning more relevant and manageable for students who are not language specialists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Arabic in Contemporary Contexts

Arabic remains one of the most influential global languages. While it is central to religious practice as the language of the Qur'an, its importance increasingly extends to trade, diplomacy, and intercultural communication (Yassin, 2023). Many higher education institutions in Muslim-majority countries now embed Arabic in their curricula to broaden students' academic and professional competencies (Eljack, 2024). Comparative studies also suggest that the perceived value of Arabic differs across regions: in Middle Eastern contexts it is often approached as a heritage language, whereas in Southeast Asia it is more strongly associated with employability and digital communication (Almelhes, 2024).

Challenges in Learning Arabic as a Foreign or Third Language

Even though Arabic is widely recognised as an important language, many non-native learners still find it quite difficult to master. The grammar can be complex, the writing system is different from what most students are used to, and chances to practise it beyond the classroom are often limited (Munawarah & Ilmiani, 2023; Nurhuda, 2022). These factors make learning Arabic a demanding process, especially for beginners.

In addition to these linguistic challenges, some recent studies in educational technology have pointed out another issue. Arabic is still not well represented in adaptive learning systems or AI-based language platforms, which means students receive less personalised feedback compared to learners of other major languages (Hehsan et al., 2024). For students who are already managing heavy academic loads such as those in business programmes studying Arabic can sometimes feel like an extra burden rather than a practical or rewarding skill.

Students' Perceptions and Attitudes toward Language Learning

The way students perceive the process of learning a new language can have a major impact on their motivation and persistence. Learners who hold positive views tend to participate more actively and show greater resilience, while those with negative attitudes often lose interest or disengage over time (Ramadhan & Soenarto, 2015).

In the case of Arabic, students' motivations are far from uniform. Some choose to learn it because of its religious significance, while others value it for academic or career-related reasons (Abu Bakar, 2025). Comparative research also points out that learners' attitudes are shaped by their cultural and educational contexts. For example, Malaysian students often highlight the importance of Arabic for future employment, whereas European learners are more likely to see it as a means of cultural enrichment or personal growth (Khusnadin et al., 2025). These contrasts show that Arabic instruction should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, teaching should respond to both local needs and the broader global role of the language.

The Role of Teaching Strategies, Resources, and Learning Environment

The way Arabic is taught plays a key role in shaping students' experiences and their overall perception of the language. Teaching methods that encourage active participation such as task-based learning, small group work, and scaffolded activities have been found to improve understanding and engagement (Al-Assaf & Amaireh, 2020; Mohammad Lotfie, Zubir, & Md Ghalib, 2013). A positive classroom atmosphere, supported by the use of multimedia and interactive tools, also helps maintain motivation and interest among learners (Pikri, 2022).

In recent years, digital and blended learning approaches have become more common, offering creative ways to make Arabic lessons more interactive. Gamified learning, for instance, has been shown to increase students' motivation (Almelhes, 2024), while blended instruction has produced encouraging results for improving proficiency in Saudi classrooms (Al-Motrif et al., 2025). However, not all institutions have equal access to these technologies. Rural and less-resourced universities often face challenges in implementing such innovations, leading to disparities that can limit students' opportunities to learn effectively (Hehsan et al., 2024).

Research Gaps in Non-Language Majors

Much of the literature on Arabic learning focuses on students in language or religious programmes, with less attention given to non-language majors such as business students. For many of these learners, Arabic is pursued for practical reasons either to meet degree requirements or to enhance employability (Mamat & Ajape, 2015; Shehata, 2024). There is also a scarcity of large-scale or computational studies that track learner perceptions across faculties and institutions. Bibliometric evidence shows a growing body of research on technology in Arabic education, but its application to non-specialist learners remains limited (Khusnadin et al., 2025). Addressing these gaps would provide a more comprehensive, data-driven understanding of Arabic learning in diverse higher education contexts.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative descriptive design was used to examine students' perceptions of Arabic learning at the university level. The aim was not to establish cause-and-effect relationships but rather to capture how students make sense of Arabic within their academic experience. This design was considered suitable because it allowed us to measure attitudes and behaviors in a structured way while still giving a broad picture of trends among the respondents.

A survey was selected as the main tool of inquiry. It offered two clear advantages: it could reach a sizeable group of students within a short period of time, and it preserved the anonymity of respondents. The latter point was important, as anonymity often encourages participants to speak more freely, whether their experiences were positive or less favorable. For this reason, we expected the survey to reflect a more honest account of how students viewed Arabic as a third language.

The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire made up of closed-ended questions. The items covered key aspects of language learning, such as the difficulty of Arabic, the teaching methods employed, its relevance to future careers, and students' motivation to learn. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). This format made it possible to identify patterns and compare the degree of agreement across different themes.

The participants were drawn from the Faculty of Business Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Mukah Campus, Sarawak. Both current students and those who had previously completed Arabic courses were invited to join the study. Participation was voluntary, and 50 students agreed to respond. While this sampling method does not ensure full representativeness, it was the most realistic choice given the exploratory nature of the study and practical constraints such as time and access to students.

Before the questionnaire was distributed, subject matter experts reviewed the items to ensure clarity and relevance. Data collection took place in the second semester, with the researcher present in class to give instructions and address any questions. This presence also helped create a more comfortable setting, so students did not feel rushed or uncertain about the process.

Data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were first calculated to summarize responses and provide an overview of general perceptions. The data were processed in Microsoft Excel and checked manually to reduce error. Beyond descriptive summaries, an independent samples t-test was carried out to compare responses across two groups: those with prior experience in Arabic and those without, as well as male and female students. The significance level was set at 0.05 to determine whether the differences observed between groups were statistically meaningful.

By bringing together descriptive and inferential techniques, the study was able to present both an overall picture of students' perceptions and a more detailed account of how background factors shaped those perceptions. This approach provided a rounded understanding of the opportunities and difficulties faced by business students who encounter Arabic as a third language.

The complete questionnaire items and coding guidelines used in this study are included in **Appendix A** for reference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study sample consisted of 50 Business Management students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Mukah. Among them, 32 participants (64%) were female and 18 (36%) were male. In terms of prior experience with Arabic, 14 students (28%) reported having some previous exposure, whereas 36 (72%) indicated that they had none. This demographic pattern suggests that the majority of participants were female and relatively new to learning Arabic a context that provides valuable background for interpreting the study's results (Mamat & Ajape, 2015; Shehata, 2024).

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (N = 50)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	18	36%
	Female	32	64%
Prior Arabic Learning Experience	Yes	14	28%
	No	36	72%

The results show that the sample included both male and female students, with women forming the majority at 64 percent. Most respondents (72 percent) also indicated that they had no prior experience with Arabic before entering the university. This demographic profile provides important context for understanding the perception scores and t-test findings, as it highlights that most participants were approaching the language as complete beginners.

Students' Perceptions of Arabic Learning

Overall, the findings suggest that students viewed the experience of learning Arabic positively, with 67.8 percent of their responses falling under the "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" categories. Among the different classroom activities, vocabulary-building exercises and short translation tasks stood out as the most well-received. Students described these activities as practical, effective, and easy to manage, helping them build confidence and strengthen their language skills.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Perceptions (Summary)

Alternative Answer	Questionnaire items										Total	%
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
SA	12	10	7	13	7	16	5	11	5	25	111	22.2
A	28	28	25	27	15	25	17	24	20	19	228	45.6
N	7	7	13	6	18	8	9	11	9	6	94	18.8
D	3	5	5	4	10	0	15	4	11	0	57	11.4
SD	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	5	0	10	2.0
Total	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	500	100%

Note. Percentages reflect the overall distribution of student responses to perception items.

The findings reveal that the majority of students expressed positive perceptions toward learning Arabic, with 67.8% of responses falling in the “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” categories. Neutral and negative responses were present but less dominant. To enhance readability, Table 2 presents only the percentage distribution of responses.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of student responses for each of the ten questionnaire items, providing a clearer overview of patterns across categories.

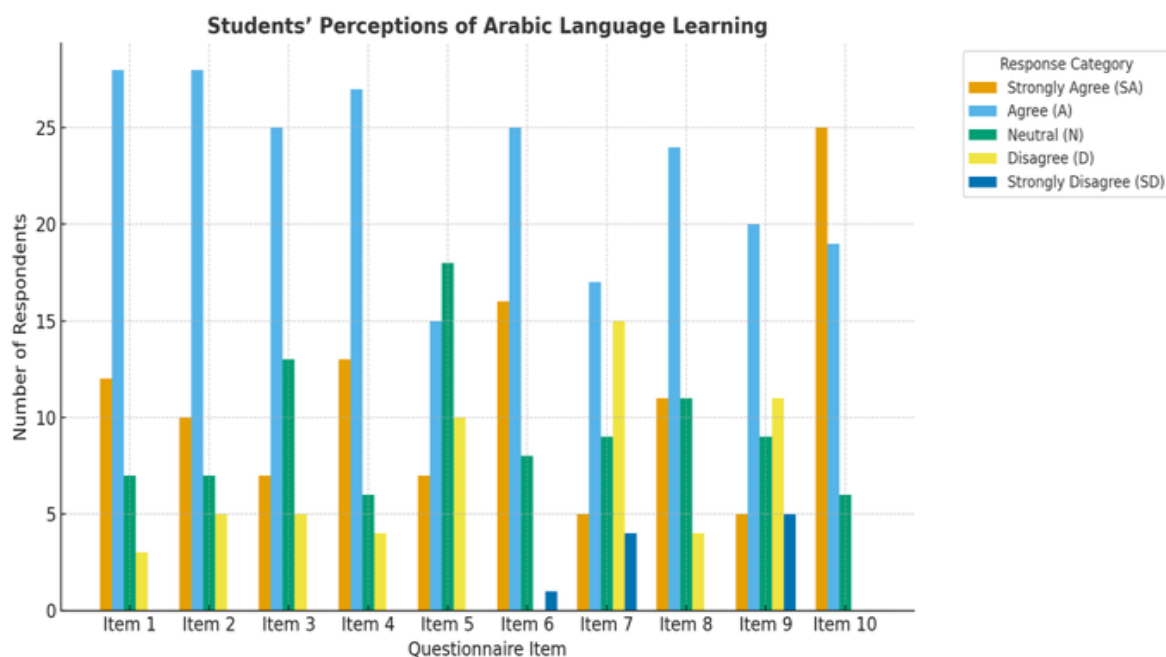


Figure 1. Students' Perceptions of Arabic Language Learning by Questionnaire Item (N = 50).

Note: The figure shows the distribution of responses to ten perception items measuring attitudes toward Arabic as a third language. Response categories include Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The chart illustrates that most students selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree,” indicating generally positive perceptions of Arabic learning.

Item-by-Item Analysis

The item-by-item analysis revealed generally positive perceptions of Arabic learning among students. Most respondents agreed that Arabic is important for academic and professional purposes (Item 1) and considered it comparable to other academic subjects (Item 2), echoing earlier findings that students recognize its value for future careers (Abu Bakar, 2025). Students also expressed enthusiasm toward attending Arabic classes (Item 3), though enthusiasm varied depending on individual motivation (Abdeldaim et al., 2023). With regard to assignments (Item 4), the majority perceived them as appropriate and manageable, noting that short tasks such

as vocabulary drills and sentence construction helped reinforce learning without being overly burdensome, a feature consistent with effective course design (Mohammad Lotfie et al., 2013).

In terms of challenges, many students acknowledged that Arabic is relatively more difficult than other subjects (Item 5), mainly due to its complex grammar and limited exposure, a finding consistent with Munawarah and Ilmiani (2023). Nevertheless, students generally agreed that the academic environment supports Arabic learning (Item 6), highlighting the role of institutional support and immersive practices (Pikri, 2022). Opinions about learning resources were mixed (Item 7), as while some valued the availability of multimedia tools, others felt facilities were inadequate, reflecting similar concerns noted by Mufidah et al. (2025). Teaching strategies were largely viewed as clear and accessible (Item 8), particularly when interactive or collaborative methods were employed (Al-Assaf & Amaireh, 2020).

Finally, students showed divided views on the overall manageability of Arabic (Item 9), with some reporting challenges in grammar and vocabulary acquisition (Hastang & R., 2023), but nearly all respondents affirmed that Arabic remains highly relevant today (Item 10), underscoring its contemporary importance for communication and global engagement (Yassin, 2023).

Inferential Findings

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether perceptions differed significantly by gender or prior Arabic learning experience.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Students' Perceptions of Arabic Learning (N = 50)

Demographic Factor	Group Comparison	t	P	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Prior Arabic Learning Experience	Yes vs. No	1.69	0.10	d = 0.25m (small)
Gender	Male vs. Female	-1.71	0.10	d = 0.24 (small)

An independent samples t-test showed no significant difference in perceptions between students with prior Arabic experience and those without, $t(48) = 1.69$, $p = .10$, $d = 0.25$. Similarly, no significant difference was found between male and female students, $t(48) = -1.71$, $p = .10$, $d = 0.24$. These results are consistent with Mamat and Ajape (2015) and Shehata (2024), who also reported limited demographic effects in Arabic learning. This suggests that demographic variables alone cannot explain variation in perceptions; rather, factors such as task design, instructional strategies, and opportunities for authentic practice are likely to be more decisive in shaping student attitudes.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the results suggest that Business Management students at UiTM Mukah generally hold positive views about learning Arabic, though they continue to face challenges with grammar, script, and the lack of opportunities to use the language beyond the classroom. What stands out is that these perceptions appear to be shaped less by demographic factors such as gender or prior exposure and more by the day-to-day learning experience: the clarity of assignments, the quality of classroom interaction, and the availability of meaningful practice opportunities.

This points to the importance of adopting task-based and communicative approaches, where grammar is scaffolded and practiced in authentic contexts. Assignments that are structured to be rigorous yet manageable can sustain motivation and, over time, strengthen competence. In that sense, the findings build on earlier studies (Mamat & Ajape, 2015; Abdeldaim et al., 2023; Shehata, 2024) by showing that even students outside language-focused disciplines respond positively when pedagogy is designed with care and relevance.

Future work could expand this discussion by including larger and more diverse student groups. Such research would be well-placed to explore how specific teaching strategies interact with different learner backgrounds and, in turn, shape perceptions of Arabic learning.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how Business Management students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Mukah perceive Arabic when it is offered as a third language. The overall findings are encouraging: many participants viewed Arabic not merely as a subject to fulfil program requirements, but as a language that holds personal and professional value. Their positive perceptions were supported by several factors, including a supportive learning environment, structured yet approachable teaching methods, and coursework that students described as fair and meaningful.

Even though most students expressed positive feelings about learning Arabic, many also spoke honestly about the difficulties they faced. Several pointed out that Arabic grammar is complicated, that the writing system feels unfamiliar, and that there are few chances to practise the language outside class. These points echo what has been mentioned in other studies and show that students still need more focused and practical support to overcome these hurdles.

When the data were analysed, there were no meaningful differences in students' views based on gender or on whether they had studied Arabic before. This finding implies that with good teaching methods and steady support from the institution, students from different backgrounds can still develop a positive outlook toward learning the language.

From a teaching point of view, the results stress how much difference a supportive and student-centred classroom can make. Using digital tools in class, breaking lessons into smaller scaffolded tasks, and giving students real chances to use Arabic in simple, authentic ways can make learning feel less intimidating. These kinds of approaches help learners gain confidence and stay motivated over time.

Still, it is worth keeping in mind that this research was carried out in only one faculty at a single university. Larger studies that include more campuses or different programmes would help to build a fuller picture and allow comparisons across various learning contexts.

In short, improving Arabic education for non-language majors depends on finding a balance between encouragement and challenge. When lessons connect closely with students' own goals and experiences, Arabic can be seen not just as another subject to pass, but as a useful and meaningful skill that adds to their personal and professional growth.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted with a relatively small group of participants from a single campus, which naturally constrains the generalisability of its findings. Future research could expand the sample to include students from multiple campuses and academic programmes, using stratified sampling to reflect differences across study levels and language proficiency. In addition to quantitative surveys, combining qualitative methods such as interviews or classroom observations would provide a more nuanced understanding of students' experiences. Incorporating objective measures, including course performance or speaking assessments, could also strengthen the validity of future analyses. Furthermore, applying advanced analytical techniques such as regression modelling or longitudinal tracking may yield richer insights into how learners' perceptions of Arabic evolve over time and under varying instructional conditions.

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APPENDIX A

Perception of Students of the Faculty of Business Management on Learning Arabic as A Third Language

This survey is part of an academic study on student perceptions of Arabic language learning. Your responses are anonymous and will be used solely for research purposes. By continuing, you agree to participate voluntarily.

SECTION A: Demographic Information

Please fill in and mark (/) on the relevant information.

1) What is your gender? <table border="1" style="margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Male</td> <td style="width: 50px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Female</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Male		Female		2) Which semester are you currently in? <table border="1" style="margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Semester 1</td> <td style="width: 50px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Semester 2</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Other:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Semester 1		Semester 2		Other:	
Male											
Female											
Semester 1											
Semester 2											
Other:											
3) Which program are you enrolled in? <table border="1" style="margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">BA119</td> <td style="width: 50px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">BA111</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Other:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	BA119		BA111		Other:		4) Have you studied Arabic before entering university? <table border="1" style="margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Yes</td> <td style="width: 50px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Yes		No	
BA119											
BA111											
Other:											
Yes											
No											
5) How would you rate your current Arabic proficiency? <table border="1" style="margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Beginner</td> <td style="width: 50px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Intermediate</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Advanced</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Beginner		Intermediate		Advanced						
Beginner											
Intermediate											
Advanced											

SECTION B: Perception Toward Arabic Language Learning

You are required to read each question carefully and please mark (/) in the space provided according to the scales below:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Mastering the Arabic language is important for both academic and professional purposes.					
2	Learning Arabic is as important as studying other academic courses.					
3	I feel enthusiastic about attending Arabic language classes.					
4	The assignments given in Arabic language courses are difficult.					
5	I find Arabic language courses more challenging than other subjects.					
6	The academic environment at my institution supports Arabic language learning.					
7	The learning facilities provided (e.g., language labs, multimedia tools) are adequate for Arabic language instruction.					
8	The teaching methods used by Arabic language instructors are clear and easy to understand.					
9	I perceive Arabic as an easy language to learn.					
10	I believe the Arabic language is still relevant in today's world.					