

Student Perceptions in Learning Basic Arabic Language

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions usually offer classes for the learning of Arabic to their students, be it as a mandatory course or an elective learning. When studied as an elective course, students will sometimes follow it with uneven effort. This study is conducted based on the performance of students who registered for a basic Arabic learning class as their foreign language learning at UKM. Specifically, the focus of this study is to understand the learning perception of students while learning SKVA 5013 Bahasa Arab 1. This study aims to find out the learning and types of perceptions that the students have. This study also aims to classify students' learning perceptions, with the intention of distinguishing both aspects. Each and every form of perception would also be elaborated on in order to correlate them with the performance of the students in class. A quantitative method was used in this study, involving 49 UKM students registered in the class SKVA 5013 Bahasa Arab 1. An online questionnaire method is used with the assistance of Google Forms software. The responses from the questionnaire are taken as the main data to be analysed in the form of percentages. Both aspects—students' perceptions—are measured by looking at the agreed-upon or disagreed-with percentages. The findings of the study show that the students practiced the majority of the attitudes asked in the questionnaire. They showed a positive attitude towards learning Arabic in addition to implementing specific attitudes regarding the basic language skills that coincide with the course structure, i.e., attitudes of writing and pronunciation. The study also found that students have good perceptions about some aspects of Arabic learning. Therefore, Arabic language teachers as well as coordinators planning Arabic language teaching at the level of higher education institutions are expected to be able to regulate a more conducive academic environment and learning facilities. This is to ensure the success of all learning goals while at the same time acquiring excellence from students.

Keywords: perception, Arabic, language learning, foreign language

INTRODUCTION

Arabic plays a significant role in the religious life of Muslims in Malaysia, particularly as it is used for daily worship practices such as prayer and supplication. Young children typically begin learning Arabic by focusing on pronunciation, reading, and memorization. Once they start school, their exposure to the language expands with formal education that emphasizes recognizing Arabic beyond its use in routine recitations. Schools introduce these students to formal studies involving basic grammar and linguistic elements like phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics through structured curricula. As they advance into higher educational institutions later on—whether or not they have prior experience—they get opportunities to explore deeper aspects of Arabic using more sophisticated scientific methods suited even for beginners without foundational knowledge.

Most Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) and Private Higher Education Institutions (IPTS) offer Arabic language learning that progresses through various stages. It begins with basic instruction and moves towards higher proficiency levels, aiming to equip students with the skills needed to use Arabic in their everyday lives.

This study involved students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who were enrolled in the SKVA 5013 Arabic

Language 1 course, available as a Citra or elective option. This particular foreign language course is offered by the Foreign Language and Translation Unit at UKM's Centre for Research on Languages and Linguistics (PKBL), which falls under the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK). The course introduces basic fundamentals of Arabic with an emphasis on writing skills and pronunciation concerning Hijaiyyah letters. It is primarily designed for non-Muslim students or Muslim students lacking prior knowledge of Arabic.

Given that this course is optional and chosen by students, it can be presumed that their performance in this class varies from their outcomes in required or core courses. This difference may stem from the distinct study approaches used in foreign language learning compared to those employed within a student's primary field of study. Performance differences might manifest through various factors such as student involvement, attitude, perception, motivation, and interest levels. Consequently, this research was carried out to examine the attitudes and perceptions of students enrolled in the Arabic language course—specifically focusing on those taking SKVA 5013: Arabic Language 1.

According to Cakici (2007), as cited in Pham Duc Tuan (2021), the role of attitude holds significant importance from a sociopsychological perspective within the language learning process. He suggested that students who exhibit a positive attitude towards both the language and its native speaker community's culture tend to find learning easier, whereas those with a negative outlook may experience disruptions in their education. Similarly, Kudo (1999) found that an individual's attitude can significantly impact their success or failure in acquiring a new language. Additionally, Klausmeier (1985), also referenced by Pham Duc Tuan (2021), noted that attitudes influence not only how much is learned but also affect student behavior during the learning process.

This study was conducted to assess Arabic language learning from two perspectives: perception, which pertains to students' views, and attitude, relating to their behavior in learning. It is hoped that the results will offer distinct data compared to previous research on language attitudes, which primarily focused on perceptions of a language.

Previous research has not focused on basic Arabic language learning as a subject of study. Most studies have concentrated on the mastery or use of Arabic among students already familiar with the language. The involvement, attitudes, and perceptions of students might differ between those at beginner levels and those focusing on advanced proficiency and skills enhancement. This study aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions of students interested in enrolling in Arabic courses at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Objectives

This study was conducted to fulfill three (3) objectives, namely:

1. Identify the perceptions of students in the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course in learning.
2. Categorize the perceptions of students in the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course in learning.
3. Analyze perceptions of students in the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course and the influence of both aspects on their learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach, focusing on the percentage of students regarding attitudes that are either completed or not and perceptions of Arabic language learning that they agree with or do not. An online questionnaire served as the data collection instrument for this research. Utilizing numerical values, quantities, and percentages processed through Google Forms allowed for effective data measurement within this quantitative framework.

To collect data, we distributed a web link to respondents via the WhatsApp application. This link directed them to an online questionnaire created using Google Forms. Respondents were advised to complete the questionnaire in about 10-15 minutes, ensuring they could provide candid feedback without feeling rushed or overwhelmed by its length. The recommended time corresponded well with the total number of questions. Support from SKVA 5013 course lecturers helped distribute this web link within their courses' WhatsApp group, guaranteeing that all

enrolled students knew about and could engage in the study. Once completed by participants, responses were recorded directly in Google Forms before being organized more systematically on Google Sheets for further analysis.

The data categorization process involves organizing the collected information according to the study's objectives and aspects under investigation. This includes sorting demographics of respondents, identifying student attitudes, analyzing student perceptions, and examining additional factors like student motivation. Such a method allows researchers to efficiently compare different facets such as attitude and perception among students.

During the data analysis phase, a quantitative method is employed to examine and characterize each dataset through percentages. Descriptive theory aids in interpreting and analyzing this information. The goal of descriptive analysis is to provide an overview or summary of the data. In this study, we utilized quantitative data that are both numerical and statistical in nature. Typically, such data are displayed using tables, pie charts, etc., with distinctions made between different aspects of interest within the dataset. This structured arrangement facilitates researchers' ability to perceive all input comprehensively and conduct more precise analyses. Ultimately, the analyzed results are presented based on quantity and percentage values.

Next, the researcher describes each data in the form of characteristic findings that represent the aspects of the study, such as the percentage of attitudes that are often done and not done, as well as the percentage of the types of perceptions that are and are not owned by Arabic language students. The overall results of the analysis will display the amount and percentage needed to achieve the study objectives. Each component in both aspects of student learning attitudes and student perceptions will contain its own percentage, in addition to the researcher's views being included.

Forming a Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was used as a research instrument to collect data for this study. The selection of the questionnaire method was made based on the ability of the technique to help researchers obtain data when the study participants or students are not on campus. This questionnaire method also very much coincides with the study objectives which require feedback from respondents. This questionnaire was designed, prepared and distributed using the Google Forms application. The questionnaire consists of three parts, namely the respondent's background or demographics, the respondent's perception of learning Arabic. The form of questions presented in the entire form is a closed question. In addition to the demographic section, all questions in this questionnaire except for four questions in the attitude section contain two response options, namely Yes or No.

The demographic section of the respondent aims to obtain the respondent's background and basic information. The questions contained in Part A are gender, age, religion, year of study, faculty, center of study and experience in learning Arabic formally. This experience question consists of answer options of preschool, primary school, secondary school, post-secondary school and also never h learning Arabic. The second part contains questions about perceptions. The goal of this section is to obtain students' perceptions of learning the SKVA 5013 course, perceptions of Arabic in general, and perceptions of themselves and the teachers who teach.

Respondents

The purposive sampling method was used to select study participants. A total of 49 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia students at the Bachelor's Degree level were involved in providing responses. This study of learning attitudes and student perceptions was also in the form of a focus group. The focus group is a small to medium-sized study sample to represent the population or specific demographic group that is to be studied. The population represented in this study is a group of UKM undergraduate students who registered in the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course. Through the sampling method carried out on the population, the study sample obtained was a total of 49 students registered in semester 2 of the 2022/2023 academic session. The selection of respondents from the students in the course was due to the focus of this study which involved the attitudes and perceptions of students when learning Arabic at the basic level.

The respondents also consisted of students from different faculties, fields, and centers of study. The involvement covered students from the first year to the final year of study. They had different experiences in learning Arabic formally, whether in preschool, primary school, secondary school, after secondary school or also had no experience at all. The age of the respondents was set from 19 years to 23 years and above. Since the registration

of the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course is not limited to Muslim students only, the religious categories of the respondents were divided into two, namely either Muslim or non-Muslim.

STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were conducted by obtaining the sum, classification and evaluation. The process of obtaining the sum is based on three parts of the questionnaire, namely the demographics of the respondents, the learning attitudes of the respondents and the perceptions of the respondents. The sum obtained through the questionnaire is then categorized according to perceptions. The perception aspect, it is divided into three:

1. Perception towards course learning.
2. Perception towards Arabic language.
3. Perception towards self and teacher.

The following is a breakdown of the sum based on the classification.

Figure 5 Student Perceptions of Learning SKVA 5013 Course

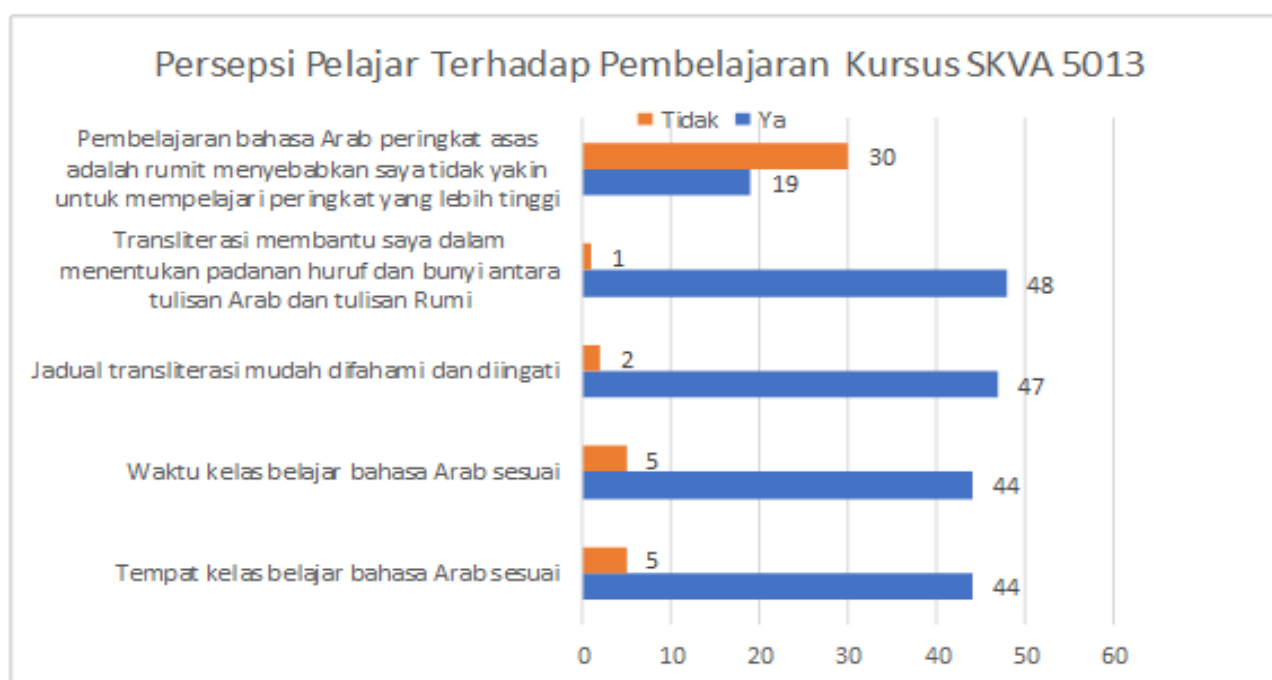


Figure 5 shows the findings of student perceptions regarding the learning process of SKVA 5013 course. This study found that all SKVA 5013 course students who participated in the study agreed on the importance of learning Arabic at the basic level before learning grammar and higher levels. The basic level includes learning phonetics, phonology, how to write and pronounce Hijaiyyah letters and reading Arabic. All 49 students, equivalent to 100% of respondents, agreed with this thought.

The next perception is related to the effectiveness of the transliteration guide provided in the SKVA 5013 course. The results of the study found that all students except two, namely 47 students (96%) agreed that the transliteration table is a guide that is easy to understand and remember. Furthermore, all students except one, namely 48 students (98%) agreed that the transliteration guide is very helpful in determining the correspondence of letters and sounds between Arabic and Rumi writing.

In addition, there was a perception question given to identify if SKVA 5013 students were interested in continuing their studies at an advanced level. A total of 19 students (39%) agreed that learning Arabic at the basic level was complicated, which made them unsure about studying at a higher level. On the other hand, a total of 30 students (61%) disagreed with this perception, indicating their tendency to continue learning Arabic.

The next figure below shows the students' perceptions of the teaching staff and themselves throughout the basic Arabic learning process.

Figure 6 Student Perceptions of Teachers & Themselves

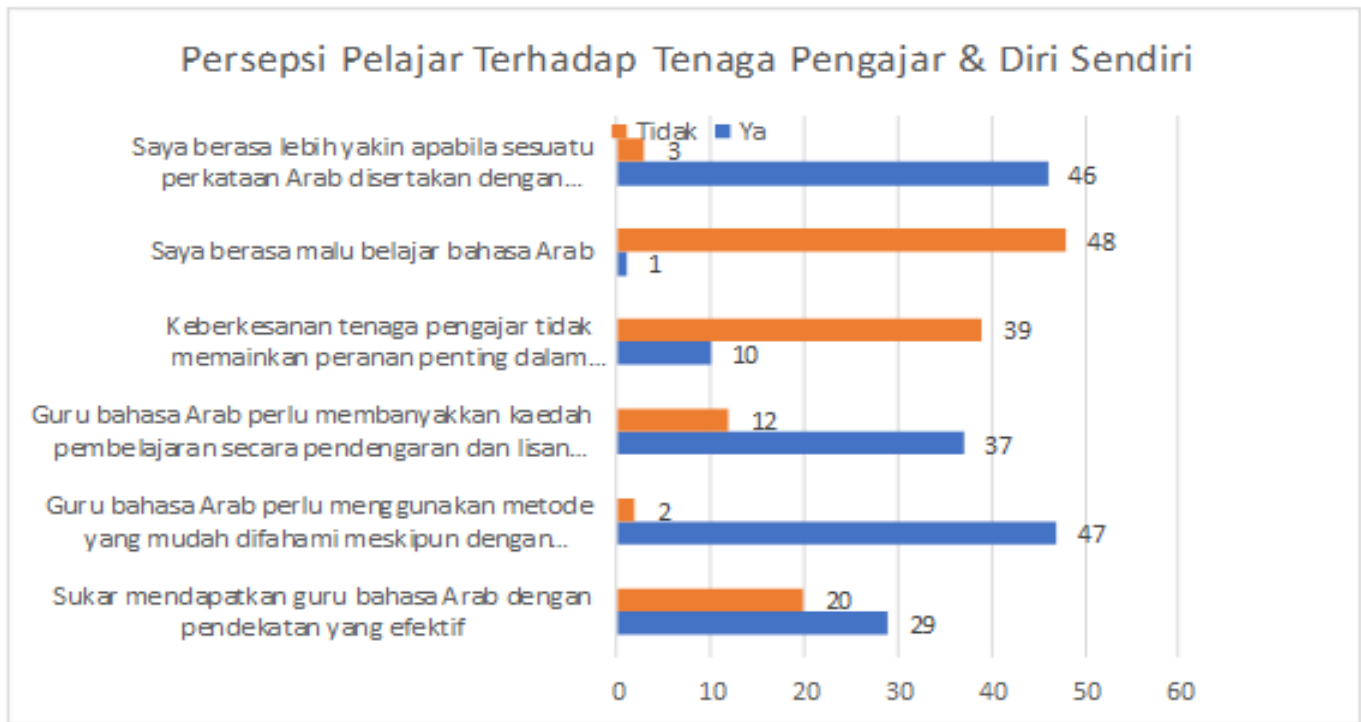


Figure 6 shows the findings of student perceptions of teachers and themselves. Based on the table, 29 students, equivalent to 59% of respondents, agreed that it is difficult for someone who wants to learn Arabic to find a teacher who has an effective approach. On the other hand, 20 students, equivalent to 41% of respondents, disagreed with this notion.

Next, almost all students, 47 (96%) believed that Arabic teachers need to use methods that are easy to understand even though it takes a long time. This shows that these students prioritize the understanding aspect first in learning Arabic. There are two students (4%) who do not have the same opinion. They may not be able to follow the same topic for too long.

In addition, regarding teaching methods, 37 students (76%) were of the opinion that teachers need to increase the use of listening and oral learning methods compared to written and reading methods. On the other hand, the remaining 12 students (24%) did not have the same view.

The findings also showed that more students, namely 39 (80%) respondents, thought that even in basic level learning, the effectiveness of the teacher's teaching method still played an important role. Only ten students (20%) thought that the effectiveness of the teaching staff was not very important in learning that was only at the basic level.

All students except one, namely 48 (98%), did not have the perception that they were shy in learning Arabic. Only one student stated that they had this feeling. In addition, almost all students, namely 46 (94%), stated that they felt more confident when an Arabic word was accompanied by the Rumi transliteration in learning. Only three students (6%) were found not to express the same perception.

In addition, for the next category, namely students' perceptions of the Arabic language in general, the data obtained is displayed in the figure below.

Figure 7 Student Perceptions of the Arabic Language in General

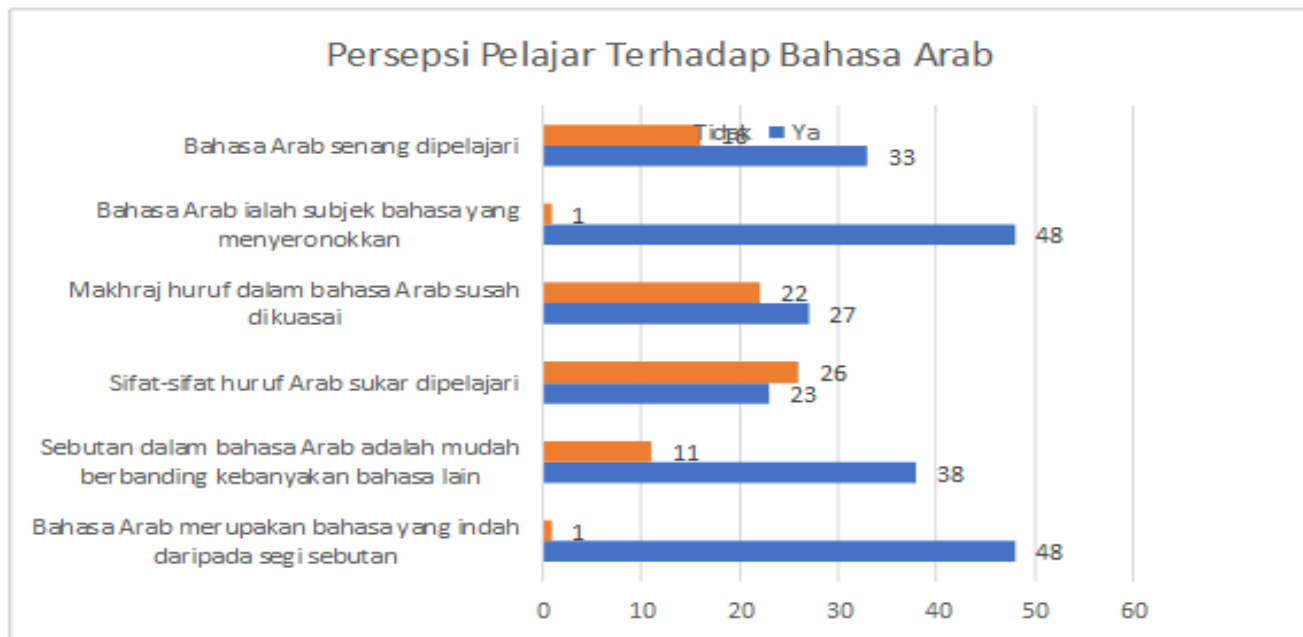


Figure 7 shows the findings of student perceptions of the Arabic language in general. A total of 33 people (67%) agreed that the Arabic language is easy to learn while a total of 16 people (33%) were found to disagree with the statement. In addition, all students except one, namely 48 people, which is equivalent to 98% of the respondents, agreed that the Arabic language subject is fun.

Next is the perception of the difficulty of learning the Arabic alphabet and letter properties. There are 27 students (55%) who agree that the Arabic alphabet is difficult to master compared to the agreement on the difficulty of learning the letter properties which has a smaller number of students, namely 23 people (47%).

When viewed from the opposite perspective, for the number of students who disagree with the level of difficulty, less than half of the students, namely 22 people (45%), disagree with the difficulty of mastering the Arabic alphabet while a total of 26 students (53%) disagree with the difficulty of learning the letter properties. The conclusion that can be made is that mastering the makhraj or articulation area of letters is more difficult for more students than mastering the properties of Hijaiyyah letters.

The next perception is proposed to ensure that students are aware of the importance of learning Arabic. The findings show that all 49 students, equivalent to 100% of the respondents, agreed. They all agreed that Arabic is important to learn as other languages.

In addition, for the pronunciation aspect of Arabic, 38 students (78%) have the view that pronunciation in Arabic is easier than most other languages. The rest, namely 11 students (22%), do not agree with this view. In relation to that, when viewed in terms of pronunciation, 48 students, equivalent to 98% of the respondents, agree that Arabic is a beautiful language. Only one student, equivalent to 2% of the respondents, disagrees.

In addition, the results of this study found that all 49 students (100%) share the same perception about the writing system. They admit that the writing system found in Arabic is unique.

CONCLUSION

This study has discussed learning perceptions in the process of learning Arabic, especially through learning the SKVA 5013 Arabic 1 course at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The researcher has selected study data in the

form of respondent responses to an online questionnaire. The data grouping was carried out according to two aspects of the study, namely the attitude category and the perception category before being analyzed one by one. At the final stage of the study, the learning perceptions of SKVA 5013 Arabic 1 students can be understood better and more comprehensively.

The researcher can conclude that the perception of practicing writing is the most frequently practiced by SKVA 5013 Arabic 1 students. Some students in this course may train themselves to write Arabic letter combinations consistently. Then, the data is followed by the perception of practicing pronunciation which is also practiced by some students regularly. In addition, the perception that is not practiced at all by students with the highest number of agreements is the listening perception. More students do not prioritize listening training throughout the Arabic language learning process. For the perception aspect, the students were found to have positive thoughts and views on all the focuses in this aspect. The focus of this aspect includes perceptions of course learning, self-confidence and teachers, as well as the Arabic language itself.

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