



## Analysis of Non-Linguistic Problems in Arabic Language Learning for Beginner Students in the Intensive Arabic Language Education at Islamic Universities

Hasna'i Masruhani<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

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### Abstract:

Arabic language learning for beginner students in intensive university programs faces significant non-linguistic challenges that impact the effectiveness of language acquisition. This study aims to analyze and describe the key non-linguistic factors influencing Arabic language learning at the State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Ampel Surabaya. The background of this research is the need to understand how motivational, environmental, and institutional factors affect beginner learners to improve learning outcomes. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through structured interviews with students and instructors involved in the program. The findings reveal that low student motivation, limited teacher competence in engaging instruction, inadequate learning facilities, mismatches between learning styles and teaching methods, restricted learning time, and the lack of an immersive Arabic environment are major obstacles. These non-linguistic factors reduce the overall effectiveness of the learning process and require comprehensive pedagogical and institutional responses. Practically, this study suggests that improving teacher training, enhancing learning infrastructure, adapting teaching methods, and fostering immersive Arabic-speaking environments can significantly support beginner learners. The implications indicate that addressing non-linguistic aspects is crucial for developing more effective and adaptive Arabic language teaching strategies in higher education intensive programs.

**Keywords:** *Arabic Language Learning, Non-Linguistic Factors, Intensive Language Program, Motivation, Teacher Competence, Learning Environment*

### Abstrak:

Pembelajaran bahasa Arab bagi mahasiswa tingkat pemula dalam program intensif universitas menghadapi tantangan nonlinguistik yang signifikan yang memengaruhi efektivitas pemerolehan bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan faktor-faktor nonlinguistik utama yang memengaruhi pembelajaran bahasa Arab di Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Ampel Surabaya. Latar belakang penelitian ini adalah kebutuhan untuk memahami bagaimana faktor motivasi, lingkungan, dan kelembagaan memengaruhi pembelajar pemula untuk meningkatkan hasil belajar. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terstruktur dengan mahasiswa dan instruktur yang terlibat dalam program tersebut. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa motivasi mahasiswa yang rendah, kompetensi guru yang terbatas dalam melibatkan instruksi, fasilitas pembelajaran yang tidak memadai, ketidaksesuaian antara gaya belajar dan metode pengajaran, waktu belajar yang terbatas, dan kurangnya lingkungan bahasa Arab yang mendalam merupakan kendala utama. Faktor-faktor nonlinguistik ini mengurangi efektivitas keseluruhan proses pembelajaran dan memerlukan respons pedagogis dan kelembagaan yang komprehensif. Secara praktis, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa meningkatkan pelatihan guru, meningkatkan infrastruktur pembelajaran, mengadaptasi metode pengajaran, dan membina lingkungan berbahasa Arab yang mendalam dapat secara signifikan mendukung pembelajar pemula. Implikasinya menunjukkan bahwa penanganan aspek non-linguistik sangat penting untuk mengembangkan strategi pengajaran bahasa Arab yang lebih efektif dan adaptif dalam program intensif pendidikan tinggi.

**Kata Kunci:** *Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab, Faktor Non-Linguistik, Program Bahasa Intensif, Motivasi, Kompetensi Guru, Lingkungan Belajar*

## INTRODUCTION / المقدمة

Arabic language learning is a strategic educational endeavor for Islamic universities in Indonesia, particularly because Arabic serves as the primary medium for accessing Islamic texts, both classical and contemporary. The inclusion of Arabic in university curricula both in Islamic studies programs and in general non-education majors reflects a recognition of its academic, intellectual, and spiritual significance (Al-Khresheh et al., 2020; Daud et al., 2021; Ritonga et al., 2022). In response, many universities have developed Intensive Arabic Language Programs (IBA) aimed at equipping students with the linguistic proficiency required to understand religious texts and to pursue academic or religious studies in Arabic-speaking countries.

The Intensive Arabic Language (IBA) teaching program aims to equip students with the ability to understand religious texts, both classical and contemporary, and improve their communication skills in Arabic. This program is also designed to support students who plan to continue their studies in Arabic-speaking countries (Akhtar et al., 2020; Al-Assaf, 2021). Although Arabic has an important position in Islamic studies, learning it is not without challenges, especially for beginners, that is, students who do not have sufficient experience in learning Arabic before (Alluhaybi, 2021; Taiebine & Faris, 2019; Valieva & Ivanova, 2022).

This condition, especially as it relates to learning for beginner students, creates both opportunities and challenges for educators. On the one hand, there is an opportunity to strengthen Arabic language education in Indonesia, but on the other hand, methodological and psychopedagogical issues arise, especially how to overcome the obstacles faced by beginners in learning Arabic at the university level (El Ouardi, 2022; Zuraiq et al., 2022). This phenomenon is of particular concern at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya, where students come from diverse educational backgrounds such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and public schools. This difference gives rise to variations in readiness to learn Arabic, both from linguistic and non-linguistic aspects (Kadam, 2021; Ma & Alfaouri, 2022; Oudeh, 2019).

Based on this background, this study aims to identify and analyze non-linguistic problems in learning Arabic for beginner students in the Intensive Arabic Language Program (IBA) at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya. The main focus of this study lies in obstacles that are not directly related to language, such as learning motivation, academic readiness, educational background, learning environment support, and student psychological adaptation.

Several previous studies have been conducted, including Brosh (2019) in his study entitled "Arabic language-learning strategy preferences among undergraduate students", which highlights the relationship between Arabic learning strategies and academic achievement. Another study by Yazid et al. (2022) entitled "The Techniques of Non-Muslim Students in Learning Arabic Speaking Skills Online" emphasizes the importance of verbal approaches in learning Arabic at the secondary school level. However, this study has a

different focus, as it studies non-linguistic constraints in the context of novice students in an Islamic higher education environment.

The formulation of the problem in this study includes three main things, namely: first, how is the Arabic language learning process for beginner students in the Intensive Arabic Language Program (IBA) at the Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya; second, what are the non-linguistic obstacles faced by beginner students in participating in Arabic language learning in the program; and third, what solutions can be applied to overcome these non-linguistic obstacles so that the learning process runs more effectively and by the objectives of Arabic language education in Islamic higher education environments.

This research is important because Arabic language learning at the university level is not only about linguistic aspects, but is also influenced by non-linguistic factors that are often overlooked in curriculum design and teaching approaches. The originality of this research lies in the focus of the analysis on non-linguistic dimensions such as learning motivation, educational background, psychological readiness, and the academic environment of beginner students, which are rarely the main focus in previous studies. Thus, this research is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions in the development of Arabic language learning strategies that are more adaptive to the diversity of student backgrounds in Islamic higher education, especially in the context of the IBA Program at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya.

## RESEARCH METHOD / المنهجية

The researcher used a qualitative approach in this study because the data needed was not in the form of statistical or quantitative figures, but in the form of graphical and detailed information about the contents of the approach. This research is called qualitative research because the data is collected and analyzed qualitatively. Nassaji stated that the intended purpose of the qualitative research procedure is research that obtains texts that regulate written words, people's language, or behavior (Nassaji, 2020).

This type of research is analytical descriptive because the researcher wants to describe and analyze in order to inform others that there are problems in teaching Arabic to beginner-level students in the intensive Arabic language study program at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya. After all, it has something different and interesting to study. The researcher tries to describe the main elements as they are and does not aim to test a hypothesis. The research process with this descriptive design is one of the studies that includes presentation, writing, analysis, and interpretation of facts (Sevilla-Liu, 2023).

In qualitative research, researchers obtain data from human sources. Using interviews, observations, questionnaires, and non-human documents. As stated by Kemparaj & Chavan (2013) that the main data sources in qualitative research are words and deeds, and the rest are additional data such as documents and others. To collect the data needed in this study, researchers need three methods, namely: observation, which is carried out in the classroom to find out the facts in the field in the intensive Arabic language education study program at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya, interviews that help researchers to collect data related to problems in the intensive Arabic language education study program for beginners at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, Surabaya. Then select a set of documents that are in accordance with the objectives and focus of the problem.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION / نتائج البحث و المناقشة

### Findings

#### **The Arabic language learning process for beginners in the Intensive Arabic Language program.**

The Arabic learning process for beginners at the Intensive Arabic Program (IBA) in UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya reflects an institutional effort to enhance students' religious and linguistic competence through structured programming. This program is managed under the Center for Language Development (P2B), which mandates that all freshmen participate in Arabic classes for two semesters. One language instructor explained, "In the first week, students take placement tests, and from there we classify them based on their Arabic proficiency. That way, the materials and instruction can be more targeted." The class sessions are conducted twice a week, from 06.00 to 08.00 WIB, and divided according to students' ability levels. Placement ensures that students with higher test scores are grouped, allowing teachers to tailor their instruction accordingly. The language program aims to systematically develop all four Arabic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) through integrative methods, including audio-lingual practice, reading sessions, and comprehension tasks.

A lecturer also described how this process is aligned with broader institutional goals. "This IBA program is integrated with academic policies," they noted, "because students must submit a language certificate before starting their thesis. That makes participation in the course mandatory." The university supports this by embedding the language program within the academic calendar, ensuring that it does not clash with other courses. Interview data indicate that the intensive program is part of a broader curriculum reform initiated after the institution changed its name to Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya in 2013. Since then, the university has expanded its programs, including language development efforts through Arabic and English preparatory programs. According to one academic administrator, "Language classes were originally informal, but since 2018 we've formally structured them as academic requirements supported by e-learning platforms."

Materials used in class are drawn from digital modules known as ILABuku, which are accessible via the P2B learning application. One student shared, "We use online textbooks during lessons. They are interactive and help us practice vocabulary and grammar, especially since our class is conducted in both online and offline formats." This integration of digital media enhances student access to standardized content and supports autonomous learning. Teachers are also trained to incorporate modern strategies to meet the needs of Gen-Z learners. One teacher commented, "We can't rely on lectures only. We mix media and use apps, especially for vocabulary drills and listening practices." This approach suggests a shift from traditional rote learning to more student-centered methods that combine structured repetition with digital innovation.

Based on the interviews and observations, the implementation of the IBA program at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya demonstrates a systematic and strategic approach to Arabic language instruction for beginners. The combination of placement-based class grouping,

digital textbooks, and institutional support ensures that students receive a balanced and targeted learning experience. Furthermore, the mandatory nature of the program, tied to graduation requirements, motivates consistent student attendance and participation. These findings suggest that the IBA program is not only an academic requirement but also a foundational strategy to build linguistic competence among first-year students. Thus, the Arabic learning process at UIN Sunan Ampel illustrates how higher education institutions can institutionalize language acquisition as part of comprehensive student development.

### Non-Linguistic Barriers in Beginner-Level Arabic Learning

The presence of non-linguistic barriers plays a significant role in the effectiveness of Arabic language learning, particularly for beginners in the intensive Arabic program. Observations in class B-16, which consisted mostly of students with low placement test results, showed that these barriers, such as low motivation, limited teaching strategy variation, restricted study hours, and lack of Arabic language exposure, hindered student participation and overall language acquisition. These findings highlight that even with well-structured curricula, external and internal non-linguistic factors significantly influence learning outcomes.

In addition, the teaching approach and competence of instructors varied significantly, which affected student engagement. When instructors used active learning methods such as visual aids or contextual examples, students showed increased interest. Conversely, teacher-centered lectures without student interaction led to low attention and frequent distraction. Compounding this, the program’s limited duration, only twice a week for less than five hours, restricted opportunities for deeper reinforcement of vocabulary and structure, especially for students who were completely new to Arabic.

Another barrier was the students’ linguistic environment outside the classroom. Those from pesantren backgrounds who were already familiar with Arabic expressions adapted faster to the material. Meanwhile, students from general education backgrounds struggled to internalize the vocabulary and lacked a support system to practice outside class. This gap in prior exposure created noticeable disparities in performance and confidence during oral drills and writing tasks.

**Table 1. Summary of Non-Linguistic Barriers in Beginner-Level Arabic Learning**

Barrier Type	Implementation Form	Observation Notes
Motivation	Students attend passively and disengage from the lesson	Learning is seen as a requirement, not an interest
Teacher Competence	Uneven classroom management and delivery methods	More interactive teachers get more student participation
Time Allocation	Sessions limited to twice a week, 2+ hours each	Students struggle with retention due to minimal exposure
Linguistic Environment	Limited Arabic interaction outside class	Pesantren-background students adapt faster and more confidently

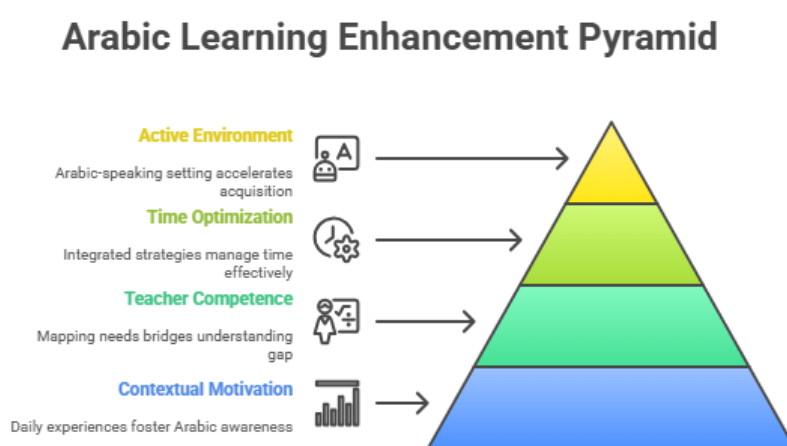
Table 1 illustrates how non-linguistic challenges collectively affect beginner-level Arabic learning. Motivation, instructional quality, time, and linguistic exposure form a set of interrelated variables that determine a student’s progress. When these factors are addressed holistically by enriching classroom practices, increasing session frequency, and fostering Arabic environments, students show marked improvements. The current situation suggests the need for supportive measures that go beyond textbook delivery,

aiming instead to cultivate genuine interest, active engagement, and consistent exposure among learners in the intensive Arabic program.

**The solution to overcome the problems of learning Arabic for beginners is in intensive Arabic language programs.**

The implementation of the Intensive Arabic Language Program at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya reveals a number of non-linguistic solutions aimed at addressing the challenges faced by beginner students. Based on interviews with instructors and selected students in class B-16, the solutions are not focused solely on language structure or vocabulary, but rather on motivational, environmental, and pedagogical aspects. One of the most emphasized strategies is the cultivation of learning motivation. Teachers initiate this by providing contextual examples of how Arabic is already part of students' daily religious lives, such as hearing the adhan since birth or using Arabic in prayer. This narrative helps students internalize the idea that Arabic is not foreign, but familiar, thereby increasing their emotional connection and willingness to learn.

In addition to motivation, teacher competence plays a crucial role in ensuring the material is delivered effectively to beginners. Competent teachers are expected to adapt learning content based on students' cognitive readiness and learning speed. This is done through careful needs analysis at the beginning of the course. One instructor emphasized that understanding students' entry-level proficiency allows for a more tailored teaching plan that prevents cognitive overload and builds confidence. Rather than pushing complex grammar, the focus is on constructing meaningful interactions through simplified material supported by visual aids and direct modeling.



**Figure 1. Solutions provided to overcome the problems of learning Arabic for beginners in intensive Arabic language programs**

Figure 1 above shows that time management also emerges as a key challenge, particularly because students must juggle intensive Arabic classes, English courses, and general university lectures. To respond to this, the program adopts a structured schedule that divides students' academic focus over two semesters while maintaining intensity through shorter but more frequent class sessions. Although time is limited, efficiency is achieved by prioritizing active practice over passive theory. This approach ensures that students experience consistent exposure to Arabic while maintaining balance with other academic demands.

Lastly, the creation of a supportive linguistic environment significantly enhances



the effectiveness of the intensive program. The strategy includes designated "Arabic hours" or "language days" during which students are required to communicate exclusively in Arabic. This immersion-based approach is reinforced through peer collaboration and monitored interactions. By normalizing the use of Arabic in daily routines, the program fosters a habit-forming environment that aligns with behaviorist principles. This environmental support system strengthens internal motivation and response consistency, two crucial pillars in developing beginner language fluency.

## Discussion

The implementation of behaviorist principles in the Arabic learning process at the Intensive Arabic Language Program (IBA) of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya is reflected through four strategic components: placement-based instruction, structured repetition through digital modules, reinforcement via academic requirements, and environmental support via immersive Arabic practices. Each strategy illustrates how stimulus-response mechanisms and reinforcement under behaviorist theory are adapted in a higher education setting to shape beginner learners' language acquisition behaviour (Musthofa, 2022; Yunis & Dajani, 2022).

First, placement-based instruction functions as a fundamental entry point to tailor learning stimuli according to the learners' initial ability. New students are given diagnostic placement tests to group them based on proficiency. This classification ensures that teachers provide appropriately leveled material, thereby avoiding cognitive overload and maximizing the effectiveness of stimulus delivery (Khasawneh & Khasawneh, 2022). According to Skinnerian theory, learning is more effective when reinforcement follows correct responses at the right level of challenge (Mujahidin et al., 2021; Mukhtar & MD, 2020). The targeted grouping method enhances student focus, fosters confidence, and accelerates responsiveness to learning activities.

Second, structured repetition, especially through ILABuku digital modules and vocabulary drills, is a dominant pedagogical practice that reflects the law of exercise in behaviorist theory. Students engage in repetitive listening, speaking, and grammar tasks both online and offline. These drills not only promote memorization but also automate responses, a core goal in behaviorist language learning. Instructors supplement drills with multimedia and visual aids, creating a consistent cycle of stimulus and feedback. Students report that regular digital practice boosts vocabulary retention and reinforces accurate linguistic responses (Elzainy & Sadik, 2022).

Third, academic policy reinforcement serves as a powerful extrinsic motivator. The program mandates that all students obtain a language certificate as a graduation requirement, transforming Arabic learning into a high-stakes endeavor. This requirement creates a consistent motivational push, aligning with operant conditioning where students are conditioned to engage through institutional rewards and consequences (Meirbekov et al., 2022). The binding nature of the certificate compels attendance and participation, reinforcing behavior through academic stakes. Over time, this fosters habitual engagement and learning persistence.

Fourth, the program implements environmental reinforcement through designated

Arabic language hours and peer interaction strategies. These immersive practices provide external linguistic stimuli and shape learner behavior through social conditioning. Students are encouraged to interact in Arabic during specific times, which aligns with the behaviorist emphasis on environmental cues in forming habits. Peer collaboration and monitored conversations further enhance response frequency and fluency. This practice supports habit formation and provides a naturalistic reinforcement cycle within the learner's daily academic environment (Al-Thwaib et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the Arabic language learning model for beginners at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya represents a pragmatic application of behaviorist principles adapted for the university level. Through diagnostic placement, structured repetition, institutional reinforcement, and immersive linguistic environments, the program fosters a stimulus-rich, reinforcement-driven learning context. These findings affirm that even in adult language instruction, behaviorist strategies remain relevant and effective, especially when supported by digital media and institutional integration. For institutions aiming to strengthen foundational language skills among first-year students, the IBA model provides a scalable and replicable framework grounded in both pedagogical rigor and psychological insight.

## CONCLUSION / الخلاصة

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that non-linguistic problems have a significant impact on the Arabic language learning process for beginner students in the Intensive Arabic Language Education program at Islamic universities. Factors such as low student motivation, varying teacher competence, limited study hours, and insufficient Arabic language exposure outside the classroom collectively hinder effective learning outcomes. However, the program's structured placement system, integration of digital learning media, and institutional support help mitigate some of these challenges by providing targeted instruction and encouraging consistent participation. Addressing non-linguistic barriers through motivational strategies, adaptive teaching methods, efficient time management, and fostering an immersive Arabic environment proves essential in improving student engagement and language acquisition. These findings highlight the importance of a holistic approach beyond linguistic content, emphasizing environmental and pedagogical factors to enhance beginner-level Arabic learning in higher education settings.

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