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Analysis of Learning Difficulties in Arabic among Grade Ten Students at Sunan Ampel Integrated Islamic Senior High School Jombang

Sukisno, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Bahasa Arab dan Dakwah Masjid Agung Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

Lili Musyafa'ah, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Bahasa Arab Dan Dakwah Masjid Agung Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

Kaila Innes Ayu Pradita, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Bahasa Arab Dan Dakwah Masjid Agung Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

Muhammad Ihsan, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Bahasa Arab Dan Dakwah Masjid Agung Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

Subira Kaserero, Saint University of Tanzania, Tanzania

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*Corresponding author:

Name: Muhammad Ihsan

Email:

lili.musyafaah@stibada.ac.id

Abstract

Language learning difficulties are a condition that reflects the gap between the expected competencies and the actual ability of students to master the linguistic aspect. This study aims to identify the form of difficulty in learning Arabic and analyze the factors that affect it in grade 10 students at Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data was collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving 10 students and 1 Arabic teacher. Data analysis is carried out using data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the main difficulty of students lies in low vocabulary mastery which has an impact on limitations in understanding texts and developing language skills. This difficulty is influenced by internal factors, such as low motivation and high language anxiety, as well as external factors in the form of limited learning media, less varied teaching methods, and lack of supporting facilities.

Keywords: *Arabic Language; Learning Difficulties; Vocabulary*



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Introduction

Arabic learning at the senior Islamic high school level, especially in grade ten, still faces structural problems rooted in low student engagement and limited learning environments that support language development. This situation is clearly evident at Sunan Ampel Integrated Islamic Senior High School, Jombang, where learning takes place with limited facilities, particularly the absence of a language laboratory and audiovisual media to support listening and speaking skills. Classroom practice is still dominated by lectures, with a strong reliance on textbooks and student worksheets, which makes Arabic treated as a subject to memorize rather than a living communication system. In this condition, students often face systematic difficulties in understanding vocabulary, sentence structure, and spoken meaning, and they also fail to develop the four language skills in a balanced way. Weak management of independent study time outside the classroom makes this problem more serious, as learning, which is a constructive and continuous activity by nature, receives insufficient exposure and reinforcement through meaningful practice (Tong et al., 2022).

From a psycho-pedagogical perspective, learning requires cognitive and emotional involvement so that information can be internalized into meaningful knowledge that students can use functionally (Nurhuda, 2022). However, in the context of Arabic learning at this school, the lack of input and limited practice make students believe that Arabic is a difficult and unreachable subject. This belief reduces motivation, increases language anxiety, and fosters passive behavior in class, thereby blocking progress in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains that should mark successful learning (Shao et al., 2024; Ulfah & Insaniyah, 2023). When the teaching method fails to compensate for the lack of facilities, learning becomes a one-way process that positions students as recipients of information rather than language users.

In language education studies, this condition can be understood through the framework of learning difficulties, which is a systematic approach to identifying the gap between expected competencies and actual student performance (Weng & Ai, 2025). This analysis serves as a diagnostic tool to reveal the cognitive and affective structures of students who face problems, enabling the design of pedagogical actions based on the core of the issue (Umam & Wijaya, 2025). The literature explains that language learning difficulties fall into two main areas: linguistic and non-linguistic problems. Linguistic problems include limitations in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics that manifest as structural errors and low vocabulary mastery, while non-linguistic problems include low motivation, language anxiety, lack of readiness in the learning environment, and gaps in the teaching method (Kormos & Smith, 2023).

This complexity becomes even stronger in Islamic senior high schools because Arabic is a foreign language with a very different morphological and syntactic system from the students' first language (Nindra & Tarigan, 2023). Grade ten students are in a transition phase from basic skills to more advanced understanding, including grammar and morphology, so they need rich input and continuous practice (Siregar et al., 2025). Ideally, listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills should grow in balance, but in conditions of limited facilities and traditional teaching methods, achieving this balance is difficult (Farid & Wahab, 2022; Umam & Wijaya, 2025).

Several studies show that communicative approaches and the use of media can reduce student passivity, but their effectiveness is often reduced in schools with

poor facilities (Choi & Hur, 2023). Even though language laboratories are considered important tools for improving receptive and productive skills, many schools still rely on traditional teaching due to management and financial constraints (Nailah, 2025). In fact, at the policy level, improving laboratory facilities and diversifying teaching methods have been identified as key strategies to reduce classroom passivity (Yazici & Nakıbođlu, 2024). However, previous studies mostly focus only on one dimension of difficulty, either linguistic or non-linguistic, without explaining how facilities, teaching methods, and students' study time interact to form a systemic pattern of learning difficulties.

Based on the various research gaps that have been described, this study is directed to examine in more depth the difficulties of learning Arabic experienced by grade ten students at Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School, considering that previous studies still tend to focus on one specific dimension, both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, so that it does not provide a complete picture of the relationship between the factors that cause low student learning achievement (Ulum & Firdausiyah, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to identify the forms of difficulty learning Arabic that arise in students, especially those related to vocabulary mastery, grammatical comprehension, and listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills; analyze the internal factors that affect the emergence of these difficulties, such as learning motivation, self-confidence, perception of self-ability, and language anxiety; and examine external factors related to learning methods, media use, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and academic climate in the school environment. This research is expected to be able to comprehensively explain the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to forming patterns of student learning difficulties in learning Arabic. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of learning difficulties in Arabic through an integrative approach that connects cognitive, affective, and pedagogical dimensions in one complete analytical framework, while practically the results of this research are expected to be considered for teachers, school managers, and education policy makers in designing more adaptive learning strategies, expanding the use of innovative media. improve the quality of supporting facilities, as well as create a more conducive learning environment so that Arabic learning can take place effectively, participatory, and in accordance with the needs of students.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine in depth the difficulties of learning Arabic experienced by tenth grade students. The selection of the case study design is based on the consideration that this design is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon that is bound to a certain context, namely the interaction between linguistic, psychological, and learning environment factors in an educational unit. Through this approach, researchers can thoroughly examine the form, causes, and impact of difficulties in learning Arabic that arise in students in real learning situations at school (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Zellatifanny & Mudjiyanto, 2018).

The research was carried out at Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School, an Islamic-based high school institution located in Jombang Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. The affirmation of the name and location of this school is important because there are various educational institutions and foundations in Indonesia that use the name "Sunan Ampel", considering that Sunan Ampel is one of the Wali Songo figures who has a great influence on the history of Islamic education

in the archipelago. However, the location of this study specifically refers to the Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School, which has institutional management, educators, students, and an education delivery system that is different from other schools with similar names in other areas, such as Surabaya, Sidoarjo, or other areas. Therefore, all findings in this study only describe the learning conditions that occur at Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School and are not intended to represent all educational institutions that use the same name.

The population in this study was all tenth grade students of Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School in the school year when the study was carried out, with a total of 36 students. Based on the number of the population, the researcher assigned 13 students as a research sample using the purposive sampling technique, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria include students who show indications of having difficulty learning Arabic, such as low participation in class, limited mastery of basic vocabulary, difficulty understanding the material, passive attitude during learning, and relatively low academic achievement in Arabic subjects. In addition, 1 Arabic teacher was involved as a key informant to provide supporting data regarding learning methods, class conditions, student characteristics and obstacles that often arise during the learning process.

Data collection is carried out through three main techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies to obtain rich data and ensure triangulation of sources and techniques (Mazhar et al., 2021; Paradis et al., 2016). Observations are carried out directly in learning activities to observe the interaction patterns of teachers and students, student responses to the material, class participation levels, and the condition of available learning facilities. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to sample students and Arabic teachers to explore experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and explanations of learning difficulties experienced or observed. The documentation study was carried out on learning tools, teaching materials, student worksheets, grade lists, and other documents relevant to the focus of the research.

Data analysis is carried out through three stages, namely data condensation, data presentation, and conclusions/verification (Miles et al., 2014). In the data condensation stage, all observations, interviews, and documents are selected, simplified, coded, and grouped into themes related to linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties. Furthermore, the data that has been organized is presented in the form of descriptive and thematic narratives to facilitate the interpretation process. The last stage is carried out by drawing conclusions gradually accompanied by continuous verification through comparison between data sources until a consistent pattern of findings is obtained.

The validity of the data is maintained through the application of credibility, dependability, and confirmability tests. Credibility is strengthened through triangulation of techniques and sources, member checking to informants, and repeated observations in the field. Dependability is carried out by systematically documenting the entire research process from the data collection stage to analysis. Meanwhile, confirmability is done by ensuring that any interpretations and conclusions generated are truly based on empirical data found in the field, not solely the researchers' assumptions (Lexy, 2011). The results of the research are expected to have a high level of confidence and can be scientifically accounted for through these procedures.

Finding and Discussion

Forms of Arabic Learning Difficulties Experienced by Students

The results of the study showed that the most dominant form of difficulty in learning Arabic experienced by tenth grade students of Sunan Ampel Jombang Integrated Islamic High School was low vocabulary mastery (*mufradat*). Based on interview data, almost all informants said that they experienced obstacles in understanding the meaning of Arabic words, recognizing vocabulary in the text, reading Arabic writing correctly, and capturing the meaning of the material conveyed by the teacher. These findings show that weak vocabulary mastery is the starting door for various other difficulties in learning Arabic. When students do not understand the meaning of words, students will experience obstacles in reading, writing, speaking, and understanding the teacher's explanations in class. One of the students said:

"... The reason for my difficulty in understanding Arabic is how to read and the meaning of Arabic vocabulary, and my understanding is half-hearted." (W/BY/01).

The quote shows that the students' difficulty lies not only in the meaning of vocabulary, but also in the technical aspects of reading Arabic letters and pronunciations. The phrase *"my understanding is half-hearted"* means that students only understand a small part of the material, while the entire content of the lesson cannot be understood in its entirety. This indicates that students may recognize certain words, but are not yet able to connect those words to the full meaning of the sentence. Another student stated:

"... I really don't understand Arabic, especially the meaning of Arabic vocabulary." (W/ZD/13).

This statement describes a fairly high level of difficulty because students feel very far from understanding the material. The emphasis on the word *"very unintelligible"* indicates a sense of academic frustration that has the potential to reduce interest in learning. Based on the learning context, conditions like this can cause students to choose to be silent, not actively ask questions, and reluctant to try to answer the teacher's questions because they feel that they do not have basic knowledge.

Similar responses were also conveyed by other students:

"... I don't memorize much Arabic vocabulary so I don't understand it." (W/PT/03).

This quote shows that students themselves are aware of the direct relationship between the amount of vocabulary mastered and the level of Understanding of the material. The less vocabulary is memorized and understood, the lower the student's ability to follow learning, as stated by students as follows:

"... I have trouble understanding the mufrodad, sir." (W/AY/07).

The statement reinforces that vocabulary problems are a common experience among students. In addition to vocabulary problems, the data also showed difficulties in understanding grammar and reading content. When students state that they have read repeatedly but still do not understand, it indicates that there are obstacles to sentence structure, grammatical patterns, and the context of meaning. One of the students said the following:

"... I don't understand the meaning of Arabic words and I don't understand Arabic, and I usually read again." (W/AD/04).

This quote shows that there is an effort to learn independently, but the strategies used are not effective enough to address the underlying problem. These findings are in line with research that states that weak vocabulary mastery is one of

the main causes of students' low Arabic learning ability (Hastang & Ahmad, 2023). Vocabulary is the main foundation in language learning because without adequate vocabulary mastery, students will have difficulty understanding messages and conveying ideas (Nation, 2022). However, this study expands on previous findings by showing that weak vocabulary not only impacts material comprehension, but also affects students' courage to participate in class as well as lower confidence.

Internal Factors Affecting Learning Difficulties

The results of the study show that internal factors of students have a great influence on the emergence of difficulties in learning Arabic. These internal factors include low motivation to learn, negative perception of self-ability, lack of confidence, anxiety when studying, and weak discipline in managing learning time. Some students consider that Arabic is a difficult subject so that students feel that they have no talent in learning it. One of the students stated:

"... I felt that I was not talented in learning Arabic so my interest was also low" (W/AD/18).

This quote shows that negative self-perception has a direct effect on learning interest. When students believe that they are not talented, then there is an assumption that even learning efforts will not produce meaningful changes. As a result, interest in lessons decreases and students tend to learn sparingly. Other students conveyed the following:

"... I am not interested in Arabic at all because I find it difficult to understand it" (W/ZD/26).

This statement shows that low interest does not appear suddenly, but is the result of a learning experience that is perceived as difficult continuously. When students repeatedly fail to understand the material, they begin to keep their distance from the lesson as a form of psychological protection from disappointment. However, on the other hand, there are still students who still have positive motivation. One of the informants stated:

"... I was very interested in learning Arabic and my motivation to learn Arabic was high" (W/BY/14).

This quote shows that not all students have the same internal barriers. Some students still have a passion for learning despite facing difficulties. This means that increasing motivation is still very possible through the right learning strategies. Another factor found was the weak management of learning time. Some students only learn Arabic during class hours and rarely repeat the material at home. One of the students said:

"... I try to study more diligently" (W/LK/08).

This statement shows that students are aware of the importance of extra effort, but consistent learning habits have not yet been formed. In language learning, success relies heavily on repetitive practice, gradual memorization, and constant exposure. These findings are in line with research that explains that motivation, self-confidence, and self-regulation are important factors in successful second language learning (Fauziah et al., 2024). Students' perceptions of their abilities greatly determine the courage to participate in class (Habayahan et al., 2024). However, this study adds that the internal factors of students in this school are formed from repeated experiences of academic difficulties, not solely because of the students' innate character.

External Factors Related to Learning Methods, Media, Facilities, and Environment

In addition to internal factors, this study found that external factors also greatly affect students' learning difficulties. These factors include less varied learning methods, limited use of media, lack of supporting facilities, and a peer environment that does not support Arabic language learning. One of the students said:

"... The teacher teaches yes, just explain, the discussion and the reading book are only lks" (w/by/27).

The quote shows that learning is still teacher-centered with the dominance of one-way explanations. The phrase *"just explain"* indicates that students are more listening than actively engaging in language practice. Conditions like this make students' opportunities to ask questions, dialogue, and try to use Arabic limited. Another student said:

"... teachers usually give more lectures, sometimes teachers teach them and are told to have a conversation in front" (W/AT/28).

This statement shows that speaking practice does exist, but it is still sporadic and has not yet become the main learning strategy. In fact, speaking skills require regular practice so that students get used to using language spontaneously. Another informant said:

"... I only have package books and LKS, usually the teacher tells me to read the ones in the LKS" (W/PT/29).

This quote shows that students' learning resources are still heavily dependent on printed materials. When students already experience vocabulary difficulties, learning that relies only on text can actually increase the cognitive burden because students have to understand the material without visual or audio assistance. One of the students stated about the facilities as follows:

"... here there is no Language Laboratory, if you learn from LKS" (W/AD/31).

Another student added the following:

"... The facilities are lacking, sir, there is no language laboratory" (W/ZD/39).

These statements show that students are aware of the link between school facilities and the quality of learning. The absence of a language laboratory causes students to lack training, listening, pronunciation, and technology-based practices. The peer environment also influences the learning process. One of the students said: *"... peers and environment were not supportive in the development of my Arabic" (W/BY/14).*

This shows that learning is not only influenced by teachers and schools, but also the learning culture among friends. If the social environment is less supportive, then students' opportunities to practice outside the classroom are reduced. These findings are in line with research that states that the quality of the learning environment has an effect on student engagement (Saputra et al., 2023). Communicative methods and innovative media are able to increase participation in learning Arabic (Fitrianto, 2024). However, this study provides a more complete picture that conventional methods, lack of facilities, and weak social support occur simultaneously and reinforce each other's learning difficulties.

Interaction of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Factors

The most important finding in this study is that the difficulty of learning Arabic is not caused by a single factor, but is formed from the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Weak vocabulary mastery makes it difficult for

students to understand the material. Difficulty understanding the material then decreases confidence and motivation to learn. When motivation decreases, students become passive and rarely practice. As a result, language skills do not develop and difficulties are repeated. This is illustrated in the student's statement:

"... I am not talented in Arabic, sir, my motivation to learn Arabic is also low because I think it is difficult" (W/IQ/24).

This quote is very important because it contains three elements at once: the perception of not being talented, low motivation, and the assumption that Arabic is difficult. This means that students do not separate between academic difficulties and psychological conditions. Both are felt simultaneously and affect each other. Other statements also show a similar pattern:

"... The arab language was very difficult, I felt not talented so I was not interested in learning Arabic either, my friends were not very supportive either" (W/KR/23).

This quote shows that students' problems are layered. Language difficulties reduce self-confidence, low confidence decreases interest in learning, and these conditions are strengthened by a less supportive social environment. At the same time, conventional learning methods and limited facilities have not been able to break the cycle of difficulty. Students still receive minimal language input, practice little, and do not have an enjoyable learning experience. As a result, the belief that Arabic is a difficult lesson is getting stronger. Anxiety, low self-confidence, and weak motivation can inhibit the effective entry of language inputs (Masnan & Ibrahim, 2023). Linguistic errors in Arabic language learning, by showing that such errors are inseparable from emotional factors and learning environment (Abubakar Garba et al., 2023). Therefore, the improvement of Arabic language learning needs to be carried out comprehensively. Teachers need to strengthen vocabulary teaching through sentence contexts, language games, visual media, and communicative exercises. Schools need to improve learning facilities and build a positive learning culture. Students also need to be given small success experiences so that their confidence grows again. Thus, negative interactions between linguistic and non-linguistic factors can be transformed into positive cycles that promote learning success.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that the Arabic learning difficulties of grade ten students at Sunan Ampel Integrated Islamic Senior High School, Jombang are shaped by the interaction of several factors, which include limited vocabulary mastery, low motivation, increased language anxiety, and a restricted learning environment with very limited media and no supporting facilities such as a language laboratory. These combined factors not only create linguistic barriers but also foster negative self-perceptions, as evidenced by student passivity, low vocabulary retention, and weak listening and speaking skills. Theoretically, these findings highlight the importance of an integrative approach in understanding foreign language learning difficulties by connecting linguistic, affective, and pedagogical factors. Practically, the results provide a basis for teachers and school administrators to prioritize vocabulary enrichment, diversify learning media, and create a safe and supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and helps students gain confidence in using Arabic. Because this study is a case study in one context, further research is needed to examine how different types of media, including digital technologies, can influence vocabulary development, motivation, and language anxiety, and to identify more effective

learning strategies to improve participation and language competence in broader contexts.

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