

Subject-Related As A Significant Demotivating Factor For Non-Muslim Learners Of Arabic As A Foreign Language

Ashinida Aladdin

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

ashi@ukm.edu.my

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to answer the following questions: a) In subject-related matters, what are the fundamental factors that demotivate non-Muslim learners from learning Arabic? Moreover,; b) How can Arabic language educators encourage Arabic learners to become more motivated to learn the language? An open-ended questionnaire was distributed to 207 respondents in order to investigate the demotivating factors among non-Muslim Arabic learners. In addition, semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents were used to conduct an in-depth investigation of the factors that demotivated Arabic learners regarding subject-related matters. Based on the respondents' elaboration on the issues raised, the researcher explored the underlying patterns of thinking that go beyond the surface level through the analysis of these data obtained using the two types of instruments. According to the study's findings, the main demotivating factor of subject-related matters is the Arabic language. The Arabic language was difficult to learn from the pronunciation, then the writing system and spelling (orthography). And its diacritics after that grammar and vocabulary memorization. In other words, the students are demotivated from learning because of the complexity of the language in general.

Keywords: Demotivation; Learning Arabic; Second and Foreign Language; Subject-Related Matters

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the teaching and learning of Arabic has always been geared toward the Malay ethnic group, due mainly to Islam being their religion. Although Arabic language is offered to all students at some public universities in Malaysia, regardless of religion, few non-Muslims enrol in the Arabic language course because they believe that Arabic is a language of Islam and is only for Muslims. This is one of the most common misconceptions about the Arabic language.

In fact, there are a plethora of advantages to learning Arabic. With approximately 300 million native speakers, Arabic is the world's second most widely spoken language. It is the official language of more than 20 countries. It enables learners to explore into the fascinating and rich cultures, traditions, and history of the Arab people as well as promoting intercultural understanding. Furthermore, knowing Arabic will provide you with access to a growing market and work opportunities all around the world (phdstudies.com, 25 July 2021). As a

result, one of the primary goals of this study is to broaden the horizon of teaching and learning Arabic language especially in Malaysian context and integrate it into the realm of other foreign languages rather than keeping it outside the milieu.

According to a research done by Aladdin (2013) non-Muslim Malaysian learners had a high favourable attitude toward studying foreign languages, and a somewhat positive opinion about the Arabic language and its native speakers. The study also found that non-Muslim Malaysian students are instrumentally driven to acquire Arabic as a foreign language since it meets university requirements. Given that non-Muslim Malaysian learners are motivated to learn Arabic, it is critical to investigate the flip-side of motivation, known as demotivation.

In the field of second or foreign language learning, demotivation is a relatively new issue which "...in spite of their great significance, have received very little attention either in mainstream psychology or L2 research" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 3). Demotivation can be defined in a variety of forms. Demotivation, according to Dörnyei (2001, p. 143), concerns "...specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action." As a result, a demotivated learner is someone who had motivation to achieve a goal but lost interest (or motivation) to do so due to negative external influences. Dörnyei (2001) also points out that demotivation does not imply that all negative influences are demotivating. It basically means that a strong negative factor is preventing the current motivation from being stimulated, while some other positive motives are still present and ready to be activated. Deci and Ryan (1985) use a similar term - "amotivation", which means "...the relative absence of motivation that is not caused by a lack of initial interest but rather by the individual's experiencing feelings of incompetence and helplessness when faced with the activity" (Deci and Ryan 1985, as cited in Dörnyei, 2001, p. 144).

Much research has been conducted in the field of second or foreign language learning on language learning motivation, but less on demotivation, with only a few studies addressing it. Although demotivation is a complex issue, it is very beneficial to study demotivation where language instructors and teachers may want to know and understand why their learners become demotivated in their classroom, and by understanding the cause of the students' demotivation, it will help the teaching and learning process of a second or foreign language become more effective, exciting, and interesting. Chambers (1993), Rudnai (1996), and Dörnyei (1998) were among the first to investigate demotivation in the field of language learning. Studies conducted by Oxford (1998) and Ushioda (1998) highlighted the critical significance of the immediate learning context on language learning demotivation.

Rudnai (1996) in her findings revealed the important elements that the students lacked most which lead to the primary cause of their demotivation are learner levels e.g. lack of self confidence; and learning situation levels e.g. being placed into a wrong group of their level of language proficiency, lack of skilled teachers, lack of free choice and lack of conducive. In his qualitative research, Dörnyei (2001a) identified nine factors that demotivated participants. He conducted

structured interviews with fifty secondary school students in Budapest, Hungary, who were studying either English or German as a foreign language and had been identified as being particularly demotivated by their teachers or peers. The nine factors are as follows: 1) the personality of the teacher, commitment, competence, and method of teaching; 2) lack of school facilities, such as large class sizes, students who are not at the appropriate level; 3) low self-esteem; 4) unfavourable attitudes toward the foreign language; 5) the nature of the foreign language study; 6) the interference of another foreign language being studied; 7) negative attitudes about the foreign language community; 8) group members' attitudes; and 9) the course book used in the language class

Among the nine demotivating factors, teacher factor ranks first with 40% of the total frequency occurrences. Students' demotivation can be influenced directly by the teacher's personality, dedication to teaching, attention devoted to students, competence, teaching approach, style, and interaction with students. Another 15% attributed the teacher's indirect negative influence, such as strict classroom management and their judgment of the teacher's tough marking. These findings were in line with earlier research. Dörnyei's study was the first to discover the compulsory nature of foreign language (FL) studies and the interference of another foreign language. The negative impact of FL's mandatory nature is clearly linked to a lack of learner autonomy and self-determination. Keblawi (2005) conducted a research on demotivating factors of learning English as a foreign language among Arab learners in Israel. The study was a qualitative in nature in which 294 Arab adolescents learning English were asked to write about the factors that demotivated them in learning the language. In order to give more insight, and interview sessions with 25 students and 10 Arab English teachers were conducted. The data shows that over half of the students mentioned English teachers directly or indirectly, with the students expressing dissatisfaction with the teachers' approach and personality traits. More than a third mentioned the classmates' behaviour as a demotivation factor that made the learning environment inconvenient. Another factor that demotivated the learners with (64.3% of the respondents) referred to the aspects of English such as difficulties with vocabulary and grammar.

Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) conducted a study of demotivators in the EFL classroom of 656 Japanese high school students through a 35-item questionnaire. Five demotivation factors were extracted: a) learning contents and materials, b) teachers' competence and teaching style, c) inadequate school facilities, d) lack of intrinsic motivation, and, e) test scores. However, contrary to previous findings, the study reveals that teachers' competence and teaching styles was not a very strong cause of demotivation compared to learning contents and materials and test score. Lessons that focused on grammar, textbook with long or difficult texts or passages, and obtaining low score in tests were a strong factors that demotivating many of the Japanese high school students, especially for less motivated learners.

With regards to the demotivation factors in learning Arabic as a second or foreign language, a study conducted by Ghenghesh (2010) reveals various factors that influenced learners' motivation of diverse group of students from 38 different nationalities studying Arabic as second language particularly as they enter senior high school in Tripoli. The study also looked at the temporal dimension of L2 motivation to see if the students' motivation changes as they progressed through senior high school. The findings support earlier empirical studies (e.g., Dörnyei 2000 and Ushioda 1996) that have revealed that motivation does not remain consistent across the many years it takes to learn a language. The research also demonstrates that when a learner gets older and proceeds to higher grades, his or her motivation begins to decrease. According to the results of the semi-structured interviews, all of the younger students stated that their motivation declined in Grades 7 and 8. In the case of older students, their enthusiasm for learning Arabic declined as they progressed through the grades (Grades 9 and 10). Surprisingly, both younger and most older students criticized the teacher for their lack of motivation. It demonstrates that, once again, the majority of students cited the teacher as the most significant cause of motivation decline. A variety of negative aspects of the teacher were cited, including the following: *'he's strict and doesn't treat us nice'*; *'he doesn't explain well'*; *'I don't like Arabic anymore'*; *'I really hate Arabic'*; and *'in his class no one wants to learn Arabic'*. It also reveals that books as factors that can influence learners' motivation as well as negative peer comments can also have an adverse impact on motivation. (Ghenghesh 2010).

Aladdin (2013) identified nine demotivating factors for studying Arabic as a foreign language in the setting of Malaysia. The most often stated demotivating factor among non-Muslim Arabic learners in this study is Arabic subject-related matter. The majority of respondents considered Arabic to be a difficult language to acquire, particularly in terms of pronunciation, followed by grammar, writing system and orthography, diacritics, vocabulary memorization, reading skills, and finally alphabet recognition. In essence, when it comes to students learning Arabic, the complexity of the language in general is a demotivating factor.

Based on the preceding findings on the demotivating factors of learning Arabic among non-Muslim learners, the objective of this present study is to find out why subject-related matter is the most demotivating factor for non-Muslim Arabic learners in Malaysia. This study will provide support in terms of understanding theories of motivation and assisting teachers in avoiding being the cause of demotivation as much as possible during the teaching and learning process by investigating the underlying demotivating factors associated with subject-related matter.

METHOD

Instruments

This section of the study employs a qualitative approach. Two tools, an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, were devised to collect

data on the demotivating influences of subject-related factors in learning Arabic as a foreign language. The open-ended questionnaire was administered to 207 respondents to allow respondents to express their opinions in their own words. Additionally, to make the interview sessions not very formal and tense, the general structure of the interview was based on Lynch's (1993: 132) interview guide. The researcher first asked the respondents with general questions, followed by specific questions, then closing questions and finally with wind-down questions.

Participants

The participants in this study are 207 non-Muslim Malaysian undergraduate students studying Arabic as a compulsory course at a Malaysian public institution. 168 respondents responded to an open-ended questionnaire, with an 81.15% response rate, out of a total of 207 respondents that took part in the study. Females make up the majority of the participants, accounting for 131 (63.3%) of the total, while males account for 76 (36.7%). The semi-structured interview was conducted with a total of 20 students.

Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis was done on the written data from the open ended questionnaire and the oral data from the semi-structured interview. Once data has been obtained, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that it is required to organise it into a manageable, easily comprehensible, and analyzable database. All of the responses to the open-ended questions were compiled, analysed, and classified according to a set of criteria. Making decisions on how to categorise certain pieces or segments of data is what coding entails. Their comments were verbatim transcribed for the semi-structured interviews. The data were then coded based on the demotivation factors and motivational orientations themes derived from the open-ended questionnaire as a guideline.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the findings obtained from both, data from and open-ended questionnaire and from the semi-structured interview. Following are the detail discussions of sub-category of the subject-related of demotivating factor mentioned by the respondents.

Table 1: Subject-related factors

Sub-category factor	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percentage
Difficulty in general: Arabic language is hard to learn; Arabic language is one of the difficult languages to learn in the world.	25	32.05
Pronunciation: Some letters are very hard to pronounce; the pronunciation makes me feel down sometimes.	15	19.23
Orthographic system in Arabic language: when it comes to join the letter, it is really difficult; always make a lot of mistake when try to write words in joining the letter;	15	19.23

very difficult; the spelling is so difficult; the symbols (diacritics) is confusing; cannot read well in Arabic; cannot be able to read fluently.	12	15.38
Arabic Grammar: Arabic grammar is hard to learn; too many rules to remember; the grammar is complicated.		
Memorizing the vocabulary: it is very hard to remember words in Arabic; spend lots of time memorizing the 'vocab' (vocabularies); just cannot memorize the Arabic words and its meaning; only knew a few of Arabic 'vocab' (vocabularies).	11	14.10
TOTAL	78	100

The highest frequency of demotivating factor is subject-related factors with $f=78$, 32.23% in total. Under the theme of subject-related matters the most frequent factor is the difficultness of Arabic language in general with $f=25$, 32.05%. The following quotes from the interviewees give much insight with regards to this factor.

Ana mentioned that *'I feel Arabic language is hard to learn.'*

Rama said that *'I found that Arabic is a difficult language, to master the language, you need to spend a lot of time.'*

Yu confessed that *'I cannot master the language after I finish the course, because it so complicated.'*

Both, Arabic pronunciation and orthographic system of Arabic factors have $f=15$, 19.23%. The following quotes give much insight into how the difficultness in Arabic pronunciation can demotivate learners:

Chong found that, *'It is very hard for me to pronounce some of the letters, such as /ر/ 'ra', /خ/ 'kha', /ع/ 'ayn', /غ/ 'ghayn', /ص/ 'ṣōd', /ض/ 'ḍōd' /ط/ 'to' /ظ/ 'zo...I can't pronounce it properly, even until today.'*

Sara mentioned that she still have problems in pronouncing some words even though she is now in Level 2 as he said *'I found that pronunciation is quite difficult, you need to practice a lot.'*

Verbatim quotes from the interviewees representing different levels of Arabic course with regards to this factor are as follows:

Danny stated that *'I can't write especially in joining letters, and also I am lacking of Arabic vocabularies to help me understand what I'm reading.'*

Kumari said that *'the symbols (diacritics) in Arabic sometimes made me confuse. I also read Arabic text very slow...'*

Wong mentioned in the interview that *'I feel quite frustrated when I can't cope with reading and can't understand what I read...I feel tension''*

The following quotes give insight into how the difficultness in Arabic grammar with $f=12$, 15.38% of the learners mentioned that grammar can demotivate them in learning Arabic language, as shown in the excerpts:

Tan said *'Arabic grammar is hard to learn and complicated, too many rules to remember, and the terms is quite confusing. Sometimes I feel hopeless trying to understand the grammar.'*

Emylia said that *'the grammar is so difficult and complicated. You need to remember a lot of things...sometimes I feel lost during the grammar part.'*

Lastly is related to memorizing Arabic vocabulary with $f=11$, 14.10% obtained from the open-ended questionnaire. Direct quotes from the interviewees are as follows:

Lee stated that *'vocabularies are very difficult to remember, very slow in memorizing. Reading as well, very hard and slow to read, it took most of my time.'*

Chia mentions that *'it is very hard to remember words and sentences in Arabic. I spend lots of time memorizing the vocab (vocabularies) and its meaning. I feel frustrated coz (because) I only knew a few of Arabic vocabs (vocabularies).'*

DISCUSSION

From the data of the demotivating factors drawn by Aladdin (2013), it was revealed that the respondents found that subject-related matters is the most demotivating factor in learning the Arabic language. Contrary to many empirical researches which revealed that the main demotivating factors were related to teachers such as teachers' behaviour, personality, communication, and teaching styles (see Chambers 1993; Oxford 1998; Ushioda 1998; Dörnyei 2001; Arai 2004; Hasegawa 2004; Kikuchi 2009), this current study found that the main demotivating factor in learning the Arabic language among the non-Muslim learners of Arabic in Malaysia is related to the Arabic language itself.

The majority of respondents claimed the Arabic language was difficult to acquire, particularly the pronunciation, grammar, writing system and spelling (orthography) and its diacritics, vocabulary memorization, reading ability, and lastly the recognition of the alphabet. In other words, learners are hindered from learning Arabic because of the language's complexity. This finding reinforces Zouhir's (2010) study, which found that Arabic is perceived as complicated and a significant barrier for learners and poses a serious challenge to them. This finding is consistent with studies by Qashoa (2006) and Hou-Keat et al. (2017), which found that subject demotivation factors were the most important determinants in language learning.

The following explanation of sub-categories under subject-related matters of demotivating factor may provide insight into why the students faced difficulties in learning Arabic.

Arabic Alphabet: Orthography And Vocalization

The Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) alphabet consists of 28 letters that represent the 28 consonantal phonemes except three i.e. ya (ي), wau (و), alif (ا). Letters are divided into categories according to basic letter shapes, and the difference between them is the number of dots on, in or under the letter. Among the

28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, 20 have different orthographic positional representations. For example, the letter 'ayn in its final, middle, first and "standalone" forms, changes into another form, as shown in the example: (ع, ع, ع) (Abu-Rabia 1996). With regards to Arabic orthography, when the alphabet is in the joining form and in different positional representations, it changes into a new form of writing as shown in the above example. These changes in shapes make the Arabic learners find it difficult to identify, memorize, and write it. On top of that, in the Arabic language there are two types of vowels, which are known as short vowels and long vowels. The short vowels are represented by the diacritics i.e. symbols of *fathah* (accusative) equivalent to /a/ sound, *kasrah* (genitive) equivalent to /i/ sound and *dammah* (nominative) equivalent to /u/sound. As for the long vowels, they are represented by the letter *alif* /ā/, *wau* /ū/ and *yā* /ī/. The other diacritics in the Arabic writing and reading system are *sukūn* (silence), *shaddah* (stress), *tanwīn* (double sound).

As a result, there are two types of vowelization in Arabic orthography: fully and partially vowelized. Fully vowelized orthography is a shallow orthography that includes both letters and diacritics that practically represent all consonants and vowels. Partially vowelized orthography, which includes only letters and excludes short vowels, is thus seen as a deeper orthography (Abu-Rabia 1996, 1997; Azzam 1989). The contrast between long and short vowels in MSA is critical for correct pronunciation and spelling, according to Frost (1994, 1995), because this language contains few pairs of words that differ solely in vowel length. Furthermore, in MSA, the length of the syllable, i.e. the vowel length, determines syllable stress. Shallow orthographies offer the advantage of ensuring that reading and writing processes are as efficient as possible.

Pronunciation

In order to assist non-Muslim learners of Arabic in comprehending Arabic pronunciation as well as their reading skills, it is suggested that the Arabic words, phrases, and sentences be fully vowelized in the textbook or teaching materials at the beginner level in order to assist the beginner learners in mastering the Arabic orthography. Azzam (1989) verifies that in fully vowelized spelling, the diacritics that mark the short vowels typically clarify the correct pronunciation of the written word.

This is consistent with Abu-Rabia's (1996, 1997) findings, which found that both poorly skilled and skilled participants improved significantly in the completely vowelized condition across all stimulus materials. As a result, vowels were effective facilitators for both skilled and inexperienced readers. According to Abu-Rabia (2004), the phonetic error was the most common type of spelling error among all types of readers. This finding suggests that relying solely on lexical orthographic knowledge was insufficient for successful spelling. There was also a spoken language intervention in the spelling error patterns. When lexical processes are impaired, the retrieval of accurate orthographic units does not correspond to the

target word's exact orthographic units, resulting in an over reliance on phonological spelling. Therefore, exercises on listening and drilling on letter and word pronunciation are recommended for the learners to improve their pronunciation.

A word in the Arabic language is composed of consonants and short vowels. In order for Arabic beginner learners in general, and non-Muslim learners in particular, to be able to read a word, phrase, or sentence, they must master the alphabet in both standalone and joined forms; and they must also recognise and use diacritics, which are vowels, to aid them in reading any word, phrase, or sentence. If the students have not been able to master these components, they are not be able to read or write.

One of the objectives of teaching the Arabic language to the non-Muslim learners at the university under investigation is so that the students will be able to read and write at certain levels at the end of the course (Aladdin & Musa 2014). In conclusion, the difficulties faced by the learners in learning Arabic are related to each other. For example, a student is not able to write or spell some words correctly because he/she cannot pronounce the words correctly or vice versa. Since inability to read and write was one of the factors that demotivated the learners in learning Arabic, the language instructors have to find more effective and innovative methods in the teaching and learning of the Arabic writing and reading skills. As for pronunciation, the teachers have a major role in finding effective ways such as by using AI technology and application in language learning to assist the students to pronounce the Arabic letter, the words and sentences in the correct way. By putting in these efforts, the motivation to learn the Arabic language among the non-Muslim Malaysian learners of Arabic might be improved and enhanced.

Vocabulary

The non-Muslim learners also expressed concern about their vocabulary limitations. Because the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is quite strong (Carrel and Grabe 2002), a limited vocabulary means that reading, which is a primary source of substantial vocabulary growth (Nation and Meara 2002), becomes slow, tiring, and unpleasant; this explains the demotivation felt by such students. According to Al-Batal (2006), the Arabic language teaching profession must address the crucial need for research into many components of the vocabulary learning process. Thus, teachers of Arabic should not ignore the students' views and needs in revising and improving the way that vocabulary is being taught so that students can gain benefit.

Memorization of the Arabic vocabularies is one of the biggest obstacles for the learners. The learners have to struggle and spend lots of time to memorize words with their meanings. Since vocabulary is one of the most important aspects in learning a second or foreign language, the limitations of the vocabulary can have negative effects on other language skills like writing, listening and speaking. For this reason, teachers have to find ways to enhance students' capability not only in memorizing the vocabularies but to use them in context. It is vital to assist students

contextualise their vocabulary in efforts to support them remember new words. In order to communicate effectively in a language, you must have a sufficient and contextualised vocabulary.

As Nation (2006: 6) mentioned, words should not be learnt separately or by memorizing them without understanding. Gu and Johnson (1996) assert that new vocabulary should be introduced in fully contextualized ways and integrated into discourse. The teachers can ask the learners to form sentences or construct a conversation based on the vocabularies taught in particular situation. For instance, if the lesson is about 'My family' words or lexical in that topic should be exposed to learners according to their level. Hence, the learners will know how to use the lexical and make the language more functional.

Furthermore, the focus of teaching is more on writing, reading and grammar and normally, vocabularies were taught within reading and comprehension syllabus (Aladdin, 2012). Therefore, it is recommended that one dedicated section of vocabulary teaching is provided in the syllabus in order to facilitate the learners in building their vocabulary inventory. It is not easy for the non-Muslim learners in Malaysia with their multilingual background to retain Arabic vocabularies because as Zouhir (2010) asserts it is the nature of the Arabic language and the absence of cognate words that exist, which makes it very hard to retain the vocabularies. Within this dedicated time, teachers can apply several effective ways and methods to help the learners to build their vocabulary inventory. For instance, teachers can introduce semantically related words, games with synonyms, antonyms and homonyms, role play or conversation activities in order to make the most of the taught vocabularies in context, so that the students will learn it better and retain the words much longer than when they are studied as isolated words. These can be done using multimedia software, and via interactive classroom (Yusof et al. 2021; Ishak et al. 2017)

Additionally, during the vocabulary lesson, drilling and repetition method should be used as an exercise in forming the meaningful sentences (Maskor et al. 2016; Baharuddin & Ismail 2014). The frequency with which learners are exposed to vocabulary words appears to affect the learners' acquisition of words, according to a number of empirical researches. These studies suggest that, for a word to be acquired, it needs to be repeated 6 to 12 times. This finding is relevant to both teachers and textbook writers and syllabus designer, who should select vocabulary items that are used frequently in the language and likely to appear in a variety of texts and contexts (Al-Batal 2006).

I would also like to draw attention to a common misconception concerning vocabulary knowledge that I have observed as a lecturer and researcher in this field of study. The students appear to be very eager to learn the meanings of each and every word they come across during the lecture. This erroneous belief is not limited to Arabic students (e.g. Folse 2004; Keblawi 2006; Zouhir 2010). However, if they do not achieve what they expect, this "eagerness" will make them feel demotivated. It is beyond the learners' ability to know every word that appears in the lesson.

When they miss a word, the students become anxious and ask the teacher to repeat it, even if it is a term they have heard before. As a result, when students experience this challenge, teachers should urge them to relax rather than worry. Again, teachers must expose students to contextual meaning rather than out-of-context meaning in order for them to retain the vocabulary.

It is recommended to the teacher to introduce the ‘Arabic root system’ to enrich the learners’ vocabulary of Arabic. In Arabic language, words are derived and formed from the root and pattern system; for example, *k-t-b* (root- means ‘he wrote’) can be formed different words into for instances *kātib* (a writer), *maktab* (a table), *kitāb* (a book). Words derived from the same root as in the example *k-t-b*, can have the same ‘core’ meaning while morphological patterns provide new shades of meaning (Ibn Hishām 1987). The Arabic root and pattern system is a useful and powerful tool for learning incidental vocabulary. When learners encounter a new word in Arabic, they might be able to make a guess of its meaning based on their knowledge of the meaning of the root through a different word. Hence, it is recommended to the teachers to introduce the root and pattern system in reading and vocabulary-building activities as early as the first semester of instruction (Al-Batal 1995, 2006).

Another effective method of teaching vocabulary is ‘guessing the meaning.’ Guessing is one of the most essential strategies for improving vocabulary learning, developing important vocabulary acquisitions skills and to facilitate meaning of new words (Oxford and Scarcella 1994; Gu and Johnson 1996). Given the huge vocabulary that Arabic learners must cope with, one of the top tasks should be to teach them how to build skills for guessing words from context (Al-Batal 2006). Teachers should encourage the students to guess the relationship in meaning of words that share the same root.

Grammar

The complexity of Arabic grammar is another demotivating factor among the non-Muslim learners of Arabic. This finding is in line with Zouhir (2010) who found that learning Arabic grammar posed a challenge to the U.S. learners of Arabic as a foreign language. It is undeniable that Arabic grammar is one of the difficult linguistic factors to master. The learners need to comprehend a totally new system, which differs from their own mother tongue in every aspect of the language. Therefore, they cannot benefit from L1 and L2 closeness and similarities due to this wide difference. The learners faced difficulties such as problems with case ending, definiteness, word order and other related basic linguistic aspect even in a simple Arabic syntax. Two examples of linguistic aspects in grammar of which the learners at the elementary level found difficult or complex are presented below.

The first difficulty is the aspect of gender in Arabic nouns. Arabic nouns are either masculine (*mudhakkar*) or feminine (*mu’annath*); there is no neuter gender. Gender is very important in the Arabic language where it is not totally predictable although nouns ending in the letter *tā’ marbūṭah* are generally feminine.

Nevertheless, not all feminine nouns have *tā' marbūṭah*, and conversely not all nouns in *tā' marbūṭah* are necessarily feminine (Hassan 1987, Stevens 2006). It is not just nouns referring to people that have gender. It will become more complex when the noun is an inanimate object (door, house, car, etc.) that is either masculine or feminine. Whether an inanimate noun is masculine or feminine is mostly arbitrary. This concept does not exist in the Malay language if to make comparison, thus the learners found it hard to understand the concept; not only is this difficulty experienced by the non-Muslims, it is also a problem to the Muslim learners.

Second is the aspect of number agreement to Arabic nouns. It is not only in a singular (*mufrad*) or plural (*jama^c*) form, but also a special dual form (*muthanna*) (Ibn [°]Āqil 1979) which is in agreement with gender; *mufrad mudhakkar and mu'annath, muthanna mudhakkar and mu'annath and jama^c mudhakkar sālim and jama^c munannath sālim*. These rules are quite hard for the learners of Arabic as a foreign language to memorize. The question that has always been asked by the learners of Arabic is 'how can we distinguish that this noun is in the form *jama^c mudhakkar sālim or jama^c taksīr?*' Thus, one area of complexity is that a high proportion of noun plurals are largely irregular and unpredictable (Ibn Mālik 1986). Even though there are certain sub patterns to follow, the sub patterns themselves are too large to memorize within a limited time of contact hours in Arabic course for the non-Muslim Malaysian learners.

Even though there are various opinions on whether grammar should be taught in the FL classroom or not, there seems to be agreement on two fundamental points: 1) grammar cannot be discarded from foreign language pedagogy; and 2) form and meaning do not have to be mutually exclusive (Saraceni 2008: 165). I am of the view that grammar should be taught in classroom in an integrated manner within four skills of language learning to make it more functional. The teacher's role is to find effective ways to simplify while delivering the lesson, and to try not to complicate the lesson for the learners that they become confused. By doing this, it may help the learners to understand the grammar lesson in an easy, uncomplicated manner.

It is important to note, however, that not all non-Muslim Arabic learners are demotivated by the challenges they have studying grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and other aspects of the language. For some, this has been an enjoyable challenge. To put it another way, this was a source of intrinsic motivation for some (see Deci and Ryan 1985; Noels 2001; Asbulah et al. 2020, Ariffin et al. 2021).

CONCLUSION

The complex structure of Arabic language itself, e.g. grammar, vocabulary, orthography, pronunciation, and vocalisation, were found to be the dominant demotivating factors in the current study of demotivating factors affecting learning Arabic among non-Muslim learners in the Malaysian context. Despite the fact that many research have suggested that teachers are the most and first demotivating factor for learning a second or foreign language, this study found that teachers are

not a prominent cause of demotivation for learning Arabic. It is hoped that the findings, which seek to demonstrate the causes of Arabic learners' demotivation, would serve as a foundation for comprehending the complexity of what demotivates Arabic learners in other contexts and settings. It is important to gain a better understanding of Arabic as a second/foreign language (L2/FL) learners' demotivation and to draw practical implications for teachers who observe a lot of demotivated learners in their classes. However, the teacher's function as a facilitator, instructor, mentor, and motivator is critical in maintaining students' motivation in learning Arabic. To conclude, it should be mentioned that most of the second or foreign language motivation studies in Malaysia have focused on the teaching and learning of Arabic among the Malay Muslims who have learned Arabic generally for religious reasons. Therefore, this study is considered the first to investigate the demotivation factors in learning Arabic among the non-Muslim learners in the Malaysian context. As a result, it is hoped that this research will make a substantial empirical contribution to the field of Arabic language teaching and learning.

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