Students' Difficulties In Arabic: A Study Of The Background Of Students Arabic Language Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the difficulties in learning Arabic based on the students' backgrounds, along with various solutions that can maximize the effectiveness of Arabic Language Education for students. This research conveys a descriptive approach with a field study. It is a simple quantitative and qualitative descriptive study, providing a narrative description of the situation. Data was collected through interviews with 25 Arabic Program (PBA) students, PBA lecturers, and The Arabic Language Student Association (HMP PBA) activists. The data analysis model used in this research follows the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The result shows that each student in the PBA study program faces difficulties in Arabic language skills and components according to their educational background. Students from modern pesantren backgrounds do not experience many language difficulties. The most significant difficulty for students is kalam skills. The factors influencing language difficulties include interest, educational background, teaching and methodological aspects, environment, student activities, and psychological and economic factors. The efforts made by the study program to strengthen students' language skills are still limited, consisting mainly of additional activities such as kalam and qiraah practice. HMP Bahasa Arab also organizes language communities, such as language workshops (daurah lughah) and competitions related to Arabic language proficiency. However, these activities are only attended by some students who are already relatively proficient in the language.

Keywords: Arabic Language; Language Skills; Linguistic Factors; Non-Linguistic Factors; Student Background

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of Indonesia's most widely studied foreign languages, making it arguably the second language after Indonesian. This is especially true in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), where Arabic is often studied more intensively than Indonesian. Arabic plays a crucial role in Islam and Islamic scholarship, as many religious texts and academic works are written in Arabic. Arabic is considered an essential language for scholars and learners. According to Al-Hadidi, besides being the language of the Qur'an and Hadith, Arabic is also the language of Islamic culture and thought (Al-Hadidi, t.t.)

In addition to the previously mentioned, Arabic is now studied in several countries for academic purposes. This is due to its beautiful structure and systematic linguistic features, which are considered superior to many other languages worldwide. Arabic also serves as the primary communication language for countries with significant economic influence and assets globally. Moreover, it has become an international language and is

officially recognized by the United Nations(Mustofa & Febriani, 2021). As a language of knowledge, the importance of Arabic is undeniable. Historically, its significance can be proven through the monumental works of scholars during the development of Islamic civilization. Many scholarly works have been preserved in Arabic, covering fields such as Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*), Hadith, theology (*aqidah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), history (*tarikh*), and many others. The world recognizes that the development of science in the history of Islamic civilization has influenced the development of the Western world. The progress of society and science in the Islamic world at that time caused the European countries to take and translate various books as sources of knowledge from Arabic into other languages in the world. Therefore, the relationship between science, Islam, and Arabic is powerful and cannot be separated. This condition encourages more people to teach it due to various factors and purposes.

Based on those reasons, Arabic has become a very important foreign language to be learned in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), in madrasahs, starting from Islamic Elementary School (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*), Islamic Junior High School (*MTs*), Islamic Senior High School (*Madrasah Aliyah*), and it is even considered a subject in general schools. Furthermore, it is also considered to be a study program at public universities.

IAIN or UIN/STAIN, as Islamic higher education institutions, give significant attention to the Arabic language (Muradi et.al., 2022). Almost all of them offer an important department or program that focuses on the Arabic language, such as the Arabic Literature department or the Arabic Language Education department. The Arabic Language Education program is one of the departments in the Faculty of Tarbiyah at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, which focuses on training future Arabic language teachers to be professionals in the field of Arabic. Not all students enrolled in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program have an educational background in Arabic studies. Some come from general schools such as high schools (SMA) and vocational schools (SMK). Government regulations on the equal status of general schools and religious-based schools provide opportunities for all graduates of schools, madrasahs, and pesantren to pursue higher education without restrictions based on their academic or vocational background. As a result, students entering the Arabic Language Education program have varying levels of proficiency.

Educational background is one of the factors that cause difficulties in Arabic language education. This is included in non-linguistic factors, which can encourage and obstruct the success of Arabic language learning. Another factor is derived from the Arabic language itself. One linguistic factor that makes learning Arabic challenging is its unique level of detail, which sets it apart from other languages worldwide. This complexity is both a difficulty and an advantage, as Arabic's distinctiveness lies in its intricate structure and systematic nature. As a result, Arabic is not only studied in Indonesia, a country with a Muslim-majority population, but also in secular nations such as the United States, Japan, South Korea, and others.

The details of the Arabic language and its different structures, in addition to having many linguistic aspects such as phonology, syntax, morphology, and others, make it challenging for learners to teach it. This makes it difficult for students to learn. Therefore, Arabic is considered difficult by students, even by some students in the PBA study program. The students of the Arabic Language Education program are directed to master Arabic language skills that align with the objectives of the PBA program. They must be proficient in Arabic, which includes: 1. Listening skills (*istima'*), 2. Speaking

skills (*kalam*), 3. Reading skills (*qira'ah*), and 4. Writing skills (*kitabah*)(Muradi, 2016). These four skills complement and support each other.

Learning Arabic is not as easy as studying other social sciences because it does not involve intricate linguistic details and interrelated aspects. Mastering Arabic requires an understanding of fundamental elements that serve as a foundation for comprehending more advanced linguistic concepts. Consequently, students in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program who lack prior knowledge of Arabic—such as the ability to read Arabic texts or recite the Qur'an properly—often face difficulties. These challenges stem from their educational background, as familiarity with Arabic significantly impacts their ability to follow subsequent coursework, alongside other influencing factors.

Research on the relationship between achievement and student background has been conducted by Muh. Iqbal (2016). The results of this study show that there is a significant difference between students who are alumni of Islamic boarding schools compared to students who are alumni of non- Islamic boarding schools or high school / vocational school with an interval of 3.36. The difference shows that there are certain difficulties for some students who are alumni of non boarding school background in mastering the Arabic language which is considered complex, because of the basic language previously owned. Muradi & Hasbullah (2016) identified several strategies used by students in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program to overcome difficulties in learning Arabic. These include memory strategies, affective strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. By applying these strategies, students feel more satisfied with the results they achieve.

Furthermore, research on the learning challenges faced by students from general schools in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program, conducted by Pratama et.al., (2022) found that students struggle with both linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties in learning Arabic. Linguistically, they face challenges in mastering vocabulary, grammar (*qawāʿid* and *iʿrāb*), and sentence structure (*tarkīb*). Meanwhile, non-linguistic difficulties include a lack of confidence and feelings of embarrassment when using Arabic.

Research on the challenges of learning Arabic in Malaysia has also been conducted by Setianingsih & Robbani (2024). Their study found that students face several linguistic difficulties, including the complexity of Arabic grammar, the vast and diverse vocabulary, differences between Arabic and their native language, challenges in reading and writing Arabic script. Meanwhile, non-linguistic challenges faced by students at Sanggar Bimbingan Permai in Penang, Malaysia, include a lack of adequate learning resources, limited study time, low student motivation, insufficient environmental support, teaching quality issues, and inadequate facilities and infrastructure.

Fatimah (2024) conducted a study on student strategies for mastering vocabulary in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program. The findings revealed that students from general school backgrounds employ various strategies to overcome difficulties in learning Arabic. These strategies include memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

The study by Muradi and Hasbullah (2016) focused on the strategies used by students in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program to learn Arabic. However, it only explored the strategies employed to overcome learning difficulties without providing a comprehensive analysis of how these challenges could be fully addressed. Meanwhile, the findings of Muh. Iqbal (2016) indicated that students' educational backgrounds play

a significant role in the difficulties they face when learning Arabic. However, this study did not discuss the specific efforts that general school students should undertake to overcome these challenges. The subsequent studies by Pratama et al. (2022) and Setianingsih & Robbani (2024) primarily provided descriptions of linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties faced by students in learning Arabic, without offering solutions. Similarly, Fatimah (2024) focused solely on the strategies used by students from general school backgrounds in mastering Arabic vocabulary, without addressing broader learning challenges or solutions. Based on the review of previous studies, this research aims to fill the gap in the study of difficulties in learning Arabic by considering students' educational backgrounds. Additionally, it provides various solutions to enhance the effectiveness of Arabic Language Education courses, ensuring optimal learning outcomes for students.

METHOD

This research is a field study using a descriptive method. According to Sukmadinata (2011) descriptive research is a study that describes the actual state of the research data. This research can be either quantitatively or qualitatively descriptive, presented in a narrative form. The study was conducted at the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Trainers, UIN Antasari Banjarmasin in 2024. The research sample can be seen as follow:

Table 1. Reseach Sample

Semester	Year of entry	Total		Total
		Men	Women	
I	2024	26	31	57
III	2023	30	46	76
V	2022	28	69	97
Total		84	146	230

The data collection methods used in this study include interviews with students and lecturers to explore the difficulties faced by students, interviews with the management of the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program regarding students' mastery of Arabic, influencing factors, and the solutions expected, and interviews with the Student Association's activities (HMP PBA). The researcher also distributed questionnaires, conducted observations, and held Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to expand the data and perform data triangulation, ensuring that the research results are accurate, natural, and comprehensive.

The research procedure follows the steps outlined by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) as follows:
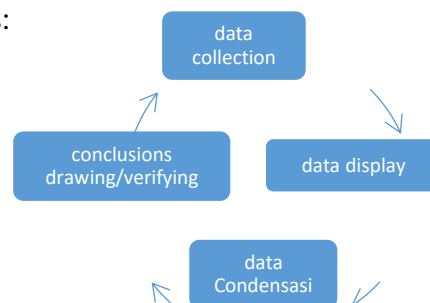
Figure 1. Huberman's Flow of Qualitative Research

The analysis in this study is both descriptive qualitative and quantitative. According to Sukmadinata N.S., descriptive research can be classified as quantitative

when it uses numbers that cannot be interpreted into words, and it can also be classified as qualitative when it describes research data or facts with words.(Sukmadinata, 2011)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the data presentation, the study will discuss the difficulties students face in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program at the Faculty of Tarbiyah UIN Antasari Banjarmasin in the 2024/2025 academic year. These issues will be explored from various student backgrounds, the factors causing difficulties in learning Arabic, and the solutions that have been proposed to address these challenges and help students master the Arabic language skills as intended.

Student Difficulties in Arabic

The issues experienced by students that lead to difficulties in learning Arabic in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Trainers UIN Antasari Banjarmasin are varied. This is stated by the students in the interviews and questionnaires distributed by the researcher. These difficulties differ according to their educational backgrounds and the factors that influence them in learning Arabic and mastering language skills. These variations include several difficulties in mastering Arabic language skills, such as listening (*istima'*), speaking (kalam), reading (*qiraah*), and writing (*kitabah*). Some students also acknowledged experiencing significant challenges in mastering complex and crucial language aspects, such as grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sharf*), rhetoric (*balaghah*), and translation (*tarjamah*).

The description of students' difficulties in learning Arabic, based on the results from the questionnaires and interviews, can be seen as follows in the table:

Table 2. Students' Language Difficulties

No	Aspect	Smt I		Smt III		Smt V	
		Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage	Number of students	Percentage
1	Istima	24	42,10%	27	36%	28	29,16%
2	Qiraah	25	43,85%	30	40%	26	27,08%
3	Kalam	36	63,15%	35	46,66%	25	26,04%
4	Imla/Kitabah	34	59,64%	34	45,33%	30	31,25%
5	Nahwu	33	57,89%	33	44%	30	31,25%
6	Sharf	27	47,36%	27	36%	30	31,25%
Number of students		57		75		96	

Speaking (*kalam*) is an important skill in Arabic language proficiency, as it enables individuals to speak or communicate fluently and accurately in Arabic to express ideas or messages. This skill is the most challenging for students, with 63.15%, 46.66%, and 26.04% of first, third, and fifth-semester students reporting difficulties in this area. This indicates that almost all students in these semesters find speaking as the difficult in language skill. Other significant challenges include dictation/writing (imla/kitabah), grammar (*nahwu*), morphology (*sharf)*, etc. Students acknowledge that these language aspects are very complex.

Speaking (*kalam*) is both a learning focus and a crucial skill in Arabic language proficiency that many students in the Arabic Language Education (PBA) program at UIN Antasari find challenging. Speaking (*kalam*) requires students to apply their oral language skills to express their ideas clearly using proper Arabic, in accordance with the correct rules of Modern Standard Arabic (*fusha*). Mastering kalam also demands proficiency in

other language aspects, such as vocabulary (*mufradat*), grammar (*nahw*), and morphology (*sharf*) (Rahman, 2024). Without this, their speaking ability remains inadequate. This is why speaking becomes one of the most difficult skills for students. It's not just about everyday conversation; it also involves speaking in academic settings, such as lectures, seminars, discussions, training sessions, and other forums, which require well-structured speech that adheres to the correct Arabic language rules. Meanwhile, speaking related to daily activities does not pose as much difficulty.

Students with a background in traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren salafiah) are the ones who face the most difficulties in speaking skills. This is because these pesantren do not emphasize the application of Arabic speaking (*takallum al-Arabiyah*), therefore they are not accustomed to practice it. Another difficulty in learning Arabic is that it is an integrated subject, closely related to prior learning. According to Wibisono (2024) and Pramesti et.al. (2024) the success of students in mastering Arabic is influenced by their educational background. This is because the fields of Arabic language study are highly detailed and complex, with each aspect being closely interconnected, making it impossible to study them separately.

Considering the aspects of language that are interrelated with each other, the mastery of all Arabic skill always intersects in the learning process and mastering it. According to several students with a background in general schools, speaking Arabic in everyday language or to express daily activities is not an issue. This is especially true for students who are already in their fifth semester, as the expectation is that they will be able to speak Arabic to convey ideas related to scientific information, such as in discussions, seminars, or certain formal forum.

Students in semester V have more difficulty in kalam skills than other skills. This is because the demands on kalam skills are greater at 26.04%. Their participation in forums that require takallum is more frequent than in the previous semester. On the other hand, they are already required to apply all language skills at a higher rate. They have also faced the necessity of applying the language, such as in Field Practice activities (PPL), Community Service Program (KKN), and thesis examination. Therefore, the difficulty of speaking Arabic is more visible.

Speaking (*kalam*) is the primary goal in learning Arabic. However, there are also those who prioritize other skills, such as reading (*qiraah*). This depends on the individual's or institution's goals in learning Arabic. Gontor, for example, serves as a model institution for Arabic language education in Indonesia. As noted by Wekke & Busri (2016) Gontor is an educational institution that has successfully produced Arabic speakers through its learning model. Arabic is primarily taught as a means of communication, and the institution has achieved its goal, with its alumni being able to speak Arabic in practical, everyday contexts.

Gontor also serves as a reference for other pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in creating students who are proficient in Arabic. (Noer et.al. (2024) and Karimah et.al., 2024). For example, in South Kalimantan, the Darul Hijrah pesantren in Martapura follows the learning model of Gontor, where both Arabic and English are taught as tools of communication (Oensyar et.al., 2024). The students are oriented to apply Arabic in practice, without neglecting other language skills such as grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sharf*), and others. However, they tend to be weaker in other skills and linguistic aspects. Therefore, the difficulty faced by students who are alumni of this pesantren is not in speaking (kalam), but rather in other language aspects.

This is different from Arabic language learning in semi-modern pesantren, such as Al-Falah Banjarbaru, Rasyidiyah Khalidiyah Amuntai, or other traditional pesantren in South Kalimantan. Arabic language learning in these institutions is focused on mastering reading skills (*qiraah*), grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sharf*), and rhetoric (*balaghah*). As a result, graduates of these pesantren generally struggle with communication (kalam), but they excel in grammar and morphology, making them proficient in other skills such as reading and translation (*tarjamah*)(Norlaila, 2016).

The situation is different when it comes to Arabic language learning in traditional pesantren. In traditional (*sharf*) pesantren in Banjarmasin, their learning orientation is focused on grammar (*nahw*) and morphology (*sharf*) as tools of knowledge. However, according to some students, the learning is typically not explained in an applicative manner with functional sentence examples, but rather through memorization methods. The language aspects of Arabic are learned in a fragmented way. As a result, when asked to construct functional Arabic sentences, they are unable to provide examples or explain the language in a functional way. In general, alumni of traditional pesantren struggle with Arabic speaking (*takallum al-Arabiyah*) and also find it difficult to apply other language skills, such as listening (*istima'*), reading (*qiraah*), and writing (*kitabah*).

Based on interviews with students from general education backgrounds, including both high school (SMA) and vocational school (SMK), they experience difficulties in learning almost all language skills and aspects of Arabic. However, some of them have started to adapt by supplementing their learning with additional language study outside of class. In this regard, the individual interest of the students ultimately plays an important role in mastering the complex Arabic language.

Some students eventually decide to switch their study program due to difficulties in mastering the language and being unable to overcome them. Generally, they come from high school (SMA) or Madrasah Aliyah backgrounds. They choose to transfer to other study programs, such as Islamic Education (PAI), PGMI, PIAUD, or other programs they consider easier. None of the students from pesantren, especially those from traditional (*salafiah*) pesantren, have applied to switch their program. In general, they rely on their *ijazah* (high school equivalency) from the *Paket C* program, so a program like PBA (Arabic Language and Literature) is considered easier for them.

Students who are more dynamic in facing their studies and mastering Arabic language skills are those from modern or semi-modern pesantren. It seems that they are in the middle ground, neither too difficult nor too easy in adapting to the challenges, which they find relatively manageable (Fauziah & Maulana, 2022) compared to students from other educational backgrounds. However, there are also alumni from non-pesantren backgrounds who are able to master Arabic well, due to their interest and extra effort in learning to overcome the challenges in studying the Arabic language.

The difficulties faced by students in the PBA program are greater than those in other programs. The first challenge is in language skills and the detailed, complex linguistic aspects, followed by other difficulties such as research methodology and others. Therefore, strong interest and effort are required from students in choosing the PBA program. Additionally, there must be efforts from the program study to address these challenges so that the program study can develop effectively.

Factors Affecting Language Difficulties Among Students from Different Educational Backgrounds

The factors that influence students' mastery of the Arabic language can be classified into two categories: 1) linguistic factors and 2) non-linguistic factors (Fattah & Rahman, 2022) The first category, linguistic factors, is the main focus of this research as it represents the primary language-related difficulties faced by students. Meanwhile, the second category, non-linguistic factors, will be elaborated upon in the following discussion

1. Linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors are the main challenges students face in mastering Arabic. This is due to the many interrelated linguistic aspects of the Arabic language that must be learned (Alkaaideh & Othman, 2024). These aspects include grammar (*nahw*), morphology (*sharf*), rhetoric (*balaghah*), pronunciation (*ashwat*), and translation (*tarjamah*). If studied partially, the mastery of Arabic will not be applicable (Hanani & Dodi, 2020) in order to achieve its purpose as a very wonderful language of communication.

In traditional (salafiah) pesantren, Arabic is studied separately in each of its aspects in detail(Fazrina & Muradi, 2020). For example, *nahw* (grammar) is studied in detail using well-known textbooks such as *al-Jurumiyah*, *Qatrun Nada*, *Ibn al-Aqil*, *Alfiah*, and others. Similarly, morphology (*sharf*) is studied in depth using famous books like *Kitabut Thasrif* and others. rhetoric (*balaghah*) is studied using books such as *Qawaidul Balaghiah* and others. As a result, students from these pesantren gain a solid understanding of language sciences but struggle with speaking Arabic effectively. In modern pesantren and Madrasah, Arabic is learned using an "all-in-one system" (طريقة وحدة), where the language is taught applicatively by integrating multiple linguistic aspects simultaneously. As a result, Arabic learning becomes a cohesive and integrated process. The teaching is also adaptive and innovative (Fathoni, 2024), focusing on the four language skills: listening (*istima'*), speaking (*kalam*), reading (*qiraah*), and writing (*kitabah*). The difference lies in the priority of the learning objectives—whether the focus is on speaking (*kalam*) skills or receptive skills like reading texts (*qiraatul kutub*) as a tool for acquiring knowledge.

It is indeed acknowledged that there are difficulties or obstacles in learning Arabic. These difficulties or barriers are often more related to interest and motivation in learning (Sayidah et.al., 2024). Therefore, when students or learners are not accompanied by genuine interest and active engagement in their studies, they generally perceive learning Arabic as extremely difficult.

Based on previous responses from students, the highest level of difficulty in mastering language skills is in *kalam* (speaking). This is because in *kalam*, students are required to speak perfectly according to the rules of grammar (*qawaid*). For students in the PBA (Arabic Language and Literature) program, *kalam* involves developing dialogues and discussions in Arabic (Putri et.al., 2025) with academic material, in academic forums, seminars, teaching practice, or when defending their thesis during the *munaqasyah* exam. In addition, *kalam* (speaking) is a skill that is directly demonstrated spontaneously with the conversation partner. In this skill, students are influenced by their vocabulary mastery, the ability to construct sentences according to the structure or *qawaid* of Arabic, and the ability to express well-organized ideas thus they can be understood and responded to by their communication

partner. In other skills, language difficulties are not as immediately apparent, such as in reading (*qiraah*). When reading, students can use a dictionary to find the right vocabulary and have time to think carefully, allowing them to construct sentences more perfectly according to the correct grammar (*qawaid*). This is because *qiraah* is not as spontaneous as *kalam* (speaking), where the response must be immediate and fluent in real-time conversation.

Students who generally have no difficulty in kalam are students who come from modern pesantren, or some of them are from semi-modern ones, because when they are in pesantren they are used to using Arabic daily. Thus, when undergoing lectures in the PBA study program, they can develop kalam skills, because they are accustomed to being practiced when in pesantren. Therefore, they only need to refine their ability to speak in specific academic forums they participate in. However, students from modern pesantren who choose to study in the PBA program are fewer compared to alumni from other educational backgrounds.

Based on these difficulties, some Arabic language professors suggest that the leadership to be able to seek breakthroughs to overcome the difficulties in learning Arabic. This is crucial, as many students are still not fully aware of the true purpose of studying Arabic at university. According to statements from several faculty members at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, only a few students currently realize that their goal in pursuing higher education is to gain deep knowledge of the Arabic language. Generally, students who continue their studies in higher education have practical expectations, seeking ease in their education and employment, as well as good achievements and career prospects.

2. Non-linguistic Factors

Non-linguistic factors also present obstacles that hinder students in the PBA program from mastering their language skills. These factors can be classified into the following categories: 1) interest factor, 2) educational background, 3) environmental factors, 4) factors related to professors and the methodology of Arabic language instruction, 5) psychological factors, 6) economic factors, and other factors that may either motivate students to master Arabic or, conversely, become barriers that impede their language acquisition.

a. Interest

Interest has a positive impact on language learning (Kunah et.al., 2024). A student's interest in studying in the PBA program plays a crucial role in determining their success in mastering the Arabic language, which is considered difficult and complex. The strength or weakness of a student's desire to attend classes in the PBA program and to master the language significantly impacts their success in learning Arabic. If their desire is strong (حماسة), their efforts to overcome the difficulties of mastering the challenging Arabic language are likely to succeed.

Regardless of their supporting educational background, students who have a strong desire generally show significant success. Based on interview results, there was a student from high school who was able to master Arabic very well because the student studied consistently and diligently. Initially, this student was far behind their peers from pesantren backgrounds, but through strong efforts such as taking courses with friends (seniors with good Arabic skills) and participating in all campus activities, both those organized by the department and by student

organizations, they managed to surpass their pesantren-background peers. Now, this student is preparing for the *munaqasyah* exam.

On the other hand, students who lack interest in the PBA program face their own challenges in mastering the Arabic language. Their GPA scores often reflect this, as their level of success in overcoming the difficulties of learning Arabic is lower. Some professors mention that compared to previous times, the grading standards have become quite lenient. Student grades tend to range from B to A+, with very few professors giving C's, and almost no students fail their courses. However, these grades no longer accurately reflect the true achievements or mastery of the subject matter.

According to several lecturers, many students in the Arabic Language and Literature (PBA) program take an instant approach to completing assignments by Googling. Some don't even read the assignments and simply copy and paste exactly from the internet. This affects students in the PBA program who face challenges with the Arabic language and require optimal effort and dedication to succeed. Based on responses from students who filled out a survey, the results are as follows:

Table 3. Student Interest in Entering UIN ANTASARI

No	Students	Interest	Parental support	Second Choice	Not graduated from another univ	Join a Friend
1			Semester I			
	45	22/48,89%	8/17%	6/13%	4/8,95	5/11,1
2			Semester III			
	66	34/51,52%	14/21,21%	7/9,09%	3/ 4,55%	8/12,12%
3			Semester V			
	81	43/53,09%	23/28,40	4/4,94	4/4,94	7/8,64

Based on the students' responses, generally, they have their own personal goals for attending university, in addition to their parents' request for them to study in the PBA program. However, there is a small group of students who joined the PBA program as their second choice, and some even admit that they enrolled because they did not pass admission to other universities. Thus, it is indeed true that a small portion of these students' issues are related to their interests. This aligns with the research by Setianingsih & Robbani (2024) which states that interest is a significant issue in Arabic language learning.

According to the description in the table, only 48.89% of first-semester students genuinely chose the PBA program, which is less than 50%. The other students chose the PBA program due to various factors, such as being directed by their parents or it not being their first choice. Some of these students had initially chosen English as their first choice but enrolled in the PBA program because they did not pass the English program admission. Additionally, some students chose the PBA program because they followed their friends. As a result, when facing coursework, students find the situation complex, especially when trying to master the Arabic language. This situation does not strengthen their resolve in dealing with the challenges in the PBA program and in mastering language skills.

As stated by several lecturers who conducted interviews at the UIN Antasari entrance selection, the PBA study program has not actually achieved the target input desired.

Some students who were interviewed are considered to have a strong foundation in Arabic language and the Qur'an, but they did not choose the Arabic Language Education program (PBA). Instead, they tend to choose majors in English, PGMI (Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education), PAI (Islamic Education), and some even opt for the Mathematics Education program. This issue should be a concern for the leadership of UIN Antasari, particularly for the Department of Arabic Language Education in the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, to find solutions in order to create PBA program becomes more prominent. For instance, by conducting socialization, collaborating with educational institutions or other organizations, so that students have better opportunities to work and dedicate their knowledge effectively.

The reason some students switch from the PBA program to other majors is due to the perceived better job opportunities in those other fields. For example, the career prospects for graduates of PAI are considered clearer compared to those from the PBA program. Additionally, as stated by several PBA lecturers, job opportunities are indeed one of the factors that motivate students to choose certain majors. This issue presents a challenge for the PBA program, in addition to the complexities surrounding the language and linguistic aspects, which are also seen as significant challenges.

b. The environment

The environment is also a factor that influences the mastery of Arabic language skills(Harnika et.al., 2024). The environment can play a supportive role, but it can also become a hindrance for students in using Arabic. Among the students enrolled in the PBA program, most live in environments where their peers also speak Arabic. This greatly supports them in mastering the Arabic language, as it creates an environment conducive to practicing Arabic communication. By living with peers who speak Arabic, they have more freedom to use the language. Some students also live in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) while studying at UIN Antasari. One of the goals is to support their studies while also mastering other fields, such as Qur'anic memorization (tahfizh). Therefore, the environment plays a significant role in encouraging students to excel in the fields they are currently pursuing.

c. Lecturers

Lecturers are a crucial non-linguistic factor in mastering the Arabic language because students can easily learn Arabic and achieve success in studying and mastering Arabic language learning. Nurhamim & Yani (2023) states that Arabic language lecturers must be able to teach using appropriate methods to deliver Arabic language materials effectively and efficiently. Regarding the professionalism of the lecturers, students generally express that the lecturers are quite professional. They master the teaching process well, explain clearly, and use strategies, methods, and teaching media effectively.

Therefore, the difficulties faced by students are not fundamentally due to the lecturers, but rather because of their weak linguistic foundation. Students who have a sufficient linguistic background do not face significant difficulties in following the courses and the methods used by the lecturers in teaching Arabic. This is because learning at the university level actually relies more on the creativity of the students themselves. This is different from students at the school

level, where language proficiency can be significantly influenced by the methodologies used by the teachers. Several lecturers who were interviewed stated that there is a significant variation between students who have a background in language education and those who do not. Students with a sufficient linguistic foundation tend to find it easier to master Arabic language learning. However, some lecturers have lowered the learning standards from the curriculum that was initially expected.

Some lecturers have suggested that students without a background in Arabic language education should be given a matriculation program for basic Arabic language learning. This would also make it easier for lecturers to teach, as the students' proficiency levels would not vary too much. Others have recommended being more selective in admitting students to the PBA program. Additionally, there have been suggestions for the PBA program to adopt a learning system and methods similar to those implemented in the tahfizh education at Rasyidiyah Khalidiyah Amuntai, where new students are trained by senior students regarding basic Arabic. This approach would help students, especially those with very low language proficiency or those without any prior background in Arabic, avoid facing too many difficulties in following courses in the PBA program and mastering the Arabic language.

d. Activities Outside of Lectures

Another factor that supports students in their language skills is their efforts to enhance other abilities outside of campus. This includes activities such as taking private lessons, studying with friends, engaging in discussions, and participating in events related to the Arabic language. Among the students, only about 2% participate in Arabic language courses organized by student organizations on campus or other activities arranged by the students themselves, and only about 10% participate in language-related activities outside of campus, such as Quran recitation sessions, specialized language learning, and tahfizh programs.

e. Psychology

Psychological factors also play a role in influencing students' ability to master the Arabic language. For example, factors such as feelings of shame when participating in language practice activities due to a lack of confidence, fear of drawing attention, and others. These feelings can become obstacles for some students. However, self-confidence is an important thing in mastering foreign languages (James & Singh, 2024) especially Arabic. Students who often participate in language practice, competitions, and language workshops tend to have higher abilities compared to others. They generally come from pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). On the other hand, students with a general education background or weak in Arabic language skills are relatively more likely to feel shy, lack confidence, and hesitate to participate in such activities.

Students with high self-confidence tend to progress and develop better in mastering the Arabic language. This can be seen in students with a background from modern pesantren, where they are often the ones who organize language workshops and participate in language competitions that enhance their Arabic skills. This is evident in such competitions, where the majority of participants are students from modern or semi-modern pesantren. For example, competitions like *Qiraatul Kutub*, quiz contests, and Arabic language debates. Students from other

educational backgrounds seem to find it more difficult to develop their skills. Therefore, according to some lecturers, it is valid to say that before entering a specific program, students should have their language proficiency aligned to avoid psychological issues due to the significant variations in skill levels among students.

The issue of meeting the quota for the input (students) in the PBA program, according to the head of the PBA program, requires the leadership to refrain a selective graduation standard in the student selection process for the PBA department. This policy, in fact, creates potential difficulties for students enrolled in the PBA program, as it does not take into account their abilities to succeed in the program.

f. Economic Factor

Economic factors can be an obstacle that affects students' ability to master the Arabic language. From interviews with students, some admitted that they work while they are in college. The work they do to cover tuition and other expenses has taken up the time that could have been spent on improving their language skills. As a result, they face difficulties in participating in additional activities that could help them master the language and other activities that encourage them to improve their language proficiency.

g. Facilities

Another factor that affects students' ability to master the Arabic language is the supporting facilities, language-related activities organized by the PBA program or by the students themselves, courses and other initiatives. Some students in the PBA department face challenges due to the lack of these facilities, which in turn affects their ability to master the language. These facilities can include learning media such as books/e-books, dictionaries, videos, and others, which can support the implementation of learning effectively and efficiently. For students, learning media affect their motivation to study (Albantani, 2021). These facilities, whether owned by the students themselves or provided by the university, can help optimize the learning process.

Based on interviews with students, 1 in 10 of them have an adequate Arabic dictionary, such as *Munawwir*, *Munjid*, or *Al-Wasith*. Generally, they only have the Yunus dictionary. Some others rely on dictionaries installed on their phones. This does not support students in practicing translation or other language-related courses. Additionally, they generally only have the *Jami'ud Durus* book, a simple book for learning basic Arabic, *nahw*, and *sharf*. It is rare for students to have Arabic reference books used in the courses within the PBA program.

The facilities used by students can be seen in how they complete language-related tasks. Generally, they rely on the internet (Google) to find answers. They take papers available online, some modify them, while others do not. Therefore, in this case, it depends on the individual lecturer who assigns the tasks, whether they pay close attention to it or not.

Several lecturers who were interviewed expressed concerns that students in the PBA program are experiencing a change in their values towards learning. They tend to be more practical in their studies, less creative, and make less effort to utilize learning resources. Students today are distracted by their phones, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media. Although some lecturers have tried

to direct and motivate students to study and master Arabic, to complete their assignments with maximum effort, it seems that the language proficiency of PBA students has declined in terms of quality. The advancement of technology has had a more negative impact than a positive one. Technology has made them approach learning and completing tasks in a more practical way, relying on Google, which reduces their effort in doing assignments and downloading existing papers. The lack of proficiency among students in the PBA program is also evident when they are writing their thesis and defending it during exams. Many students are often unable to answer questions that are considered relatively easy, such as forming simple sentences like *jumlah ismiyah* (noun sentences) and *jumlah fi'liyah* (verb sentences). These are basic skills in the Arabic language that should have been mastered early in the program. This issue must be addressed by the PBA program by activating various activities that can provide additional foundational language skills, especially for students with weak language foundations.

Efforts Made by the Arabic Language Education Study Program to Overcome Student Difficulties in Arabic Language Speaking

The efforts made by the PBA program to enhance students' language skills have begun to be implemented, although it has not been maximized. There are two additional activities organized by the PBA program to address the challenges students face in mastering the Arabic language. These activities are: 1) additional practice sessions focused on speaking skills, which are organized by the department and led by one of the PBA lecturers, and 2) additional practice for students in reading skills (*qiraah*), coordinated by a designated PBA lecture.In addition to the activities organized by the PBA program, there are also extracurricular language learning activities carried out by the HMP PBA. The activities or programs aimed at strengthening Arabic language skills, organized by the HMP, include: 1) *Al-Tajj* and a Vocabulary Bulletin Board. However, not all students participate in these programs, so their impact is limited to a small number of students who engage in them to develop their language skills.

According to statements from several students and PBA lecturers, these activities seem to be ineffective so far, as they are only participated in by a small number of students. Some of the reasons include: (1) Students are unaware of the program being held. This may be due to insufficient socialization of the activities, or because students do not seek information or are too busy with other things; (2) Students are occupied with other activities, such as organizational work and completing other assignments that take up their time; (3) A lack of interest in participating in the activities, as students feel they don't have the right companions or that the activities do not align with their expectations; (4) The additional programs are not mandatory for students, so there is no pressure to participate; (5) The schedule of the activities/programs conflicts with the students' class schedules; (6) There is no financial support for students to participate in additional activities aimed at improving their Arabic language skills; (7) The program is not appealing to some students; and (8) The topics covered in the program are already well-mastered by some students, so they are not interested in participating.

The training efforts organized by the PBA program have been poorly attended by students. When the issue was explored, responses from PBA program students and HMP can be seen as follow:

Table 4. Student Non-Involvement in Activities Implemented by the Department

	Economic factors	coursework business	Shyness/Psychology	Not capable	No idea	Students
Number of Students	20	54	45	17	56	192
Percentage	10,42%	28,13%	23,44%	8,85%	19,17	100%

Those are the issues faced by students in the PBA program, which may serve as considerations for the PBA program to enhance students' Arabic language skills. Therefore, more efforts are needed to motivate students and to implement more effective strategies to address these problems. In order to explore student input and suggestions on how to overcome the difficulties of PBA students in language skills, the researchers collected suggestions from students and lecturers in the PBA study program related to what activities or programs are expected to be implemented in the PBA study program to strengthen students' abilities in Arabic language.

Based on several suggestions in the table, they can be classified into three categories of implementation: 1) activities that can be directly carried out by the PBA program to strengthen the overall Arabic language skills of PBA students, 2) suggested activities that should be carried out by student organizations with guidance from the PBA program, such as encouraging the HMP PBA to focus their extracurricular activities more on enhancing the language skills of PBA students, and 3) activities that can be carried out by individual lecturers in their respective areas.

The proposed activities are detailed based on the classification of language skills or linguistic aspects as follows:

1. Listening Skill (*Maharah Istima'*)

    For the listening skill (maharah istima), there are several suggestions from students that have been proposed to improve or address language issues among students. However, these suggestions have been classified by the researcher to determine whether they should be implemented as part of the PBA program, by the HMP PBA, or by lecturers related to the listening aspect. Some suggested activities that can be implemented as part of the PBA program are as follows:

    a. The following should be considered as part of the PBA program: (1) Inviting native speakers; (2) Language dormitory program (to create a language environment); (3) Active listening to Arabic audio materials; and (4) Watching Arabic language films.

    b. The following should be considered as programs that can be implemented by HMP PBA: (1) Playing Arabic audio materials, (2) Special listening activities (istima') on a weekly or monthly basis, and (3) Arabic-speaking speakers should be activated during the day.

    c. The following should be considered as programs may be taken into account by the lecturers related to the listening field include the following: (1) Teaching methods that encourage student participation, (2) Adding free time outside of class, and (3) Implementing engaging learning methods, such as learning through play.

2. Reading Skill (*Maharah Qiraah*)

    In this aspect, there is already a program implemented by the department by scheduling one of the PBA program lecturers. However, most students do not participate due to various reasons, which has caused the program to be ineffective. For this reason, there needs to be a clearer program or effort by the PBA program to

improve students' language skills, especially in the area of *maharah qiraah*. This is important, considering that Qira'ah is a language skill that students must master in order to read Arabic books or texts, which are central to their studies in the PBA program. Among the suggestions from students in response to the questionnaire, the researcher classified them into considerations for the program study, HMP, and the lecturers involved in the aspect of *qiraah*. It can be seen as follows:

a. The following suggestions should be considered to become programs implemented by the PBA study program: (1) Learning guided by experts in the field; (2) Expanding the collection of important Arabic books; (3) Organizing a competition for reading classical Islamic texts; (4) Conducting training for reading classical and modern Arabic texts; (5) Implementing an Arabic language dormitory program to create an Arabic-speaking environment; (6) Launching an Arabic language magazine/tabloid; dan (7) Organizing a study forum for reading classical Islamic texts, known as *bahtsul al-Ilm.*

b. The following suggestions could be considered by the HMP PBA are as follows; (1) A study club specifically for reading classical Islamic texts; (2) A *Halaqah* (study group) for reading Arabic texts; dan (3) A weekly study of classical Islamic texts.

c. Suggested activities that could be considered by the lecturers related to the aspect/maharah of qira'ah are as follows: (1) Exercises on i'rab (grammatical analysis); dan (2) Instruction guided by expert lecturers.

3. Speaking Skill (*Maharah Kalam*)

An important aspect of the Arabic language is the aspect of speaking (*kalam*). This aspect is one of the fields that is included in the Arabic language skills course. The goal of this course is for students to be able to speak Arabic proficiently. In addition to the lectures, activities or programs are needed outside of class to enhance students' speaking skills in Arabic. Therefore, it is important to consider student proposals for appropriate programs to improve their Arabic language skills. The programs are categorized by the researcher to be implemented by: 1) the Arabic Language Study Program (PBA), 2) the PBA Student Association (HMP PBA), and 3) PBA lecturers related to the *kalam* aspect. The programs are outlined as follows:

a. The proposed programs that can be implemented by the PBA study program are as follows: (1) Creating a mandatory language environment; (2) Language dormitory program; (3) Arabic language communication practice; (4) Inviting native speakers; (5) Arabic language discussions; (6) Arabic language day; and (7) Activating audio or multimedia screenings.

b. The proposed programs that can be implemented by the PBA Student Association (HMP PBA) are as follows: (1) Group study sessions; (2) Speaking Arabic every day; (3) Debate training; (4) Alternating between giving speeches, poetry readings, or Arabic conversations in each local group; (5) Conducting *muhadarah* (lectures) in Arabic; and (6) Requiring the use of Arabic on certain days.

c. The proposed activities that can be implemented by lecturers related to *takallum* (speaking) are as follows: (1) Encouraging the use of Arabic in the classroom; (2) Extending free time outside of class for language practice..

4. Writing Skill (*Maharah Kitabah*)

The aspect of kitabah is one of the most important Arabic language skills with the aim that students are able to write in Arabic, namely expressing messages or ideas in

Arabic, both related to daily language, the language of scientific information, philosophy, about manners and others. Therefore, *kitabah* is a very important course for students to take. To encourage the development of motivation for *kitabah* activities, several suggestions from students can be directed towards the PBA study program, the PBA Student Association (HMP PBA), and the lecturers who focus on this aspect of *kitabah*. The suggestions are as follows:

a. The proposed *kitabah* programs that can be implemented by the PBA study program are as follows: (1) Weekly or scheduled *kitabah* training sessions, (2) Organizing a monthly bulletin board with rewards for good contributions, (3) Language dormitory program.

b. The proposed activities that can be implemented by the PBA Student Association (HMP) to strengthen the *kitabah* aspect for PBA students are as follows: (1) Scientific writing program, (2) Arabic scientific writing competition, (3) Group study sessions

c. The proposals to be implemented by Arabic language lecturers in the *kitabah* aspect are as follows: (1) Strengthening learning with Arabic-language literature, (2) Practicing writing papers in Arabic, (3) Assigning analysis and *insya* tasks (creative writing), (4) Composing simple Arabic texts, and (5) Writing simple Arabic-language works.

5. Nahwu

In the aspect of *Ilm an-Nahw* (Arabic grammar), the suggestions from students through surveys and interviews can be described as follows:

a. Implementing matriculation related to additional *nahw* aspects according to level,
b. Conducting intensive group mentoring, which can be carried out by assigning senior students,
c. Providing additional exercises outside of scheduled lectures,
d. Ensuring that the learning process is carried out intensively,
e. Developing a course program for *nahw* lessons,
f. Implementing advanced *nahw* learning,
g. Implementing basic *nahw* learning,
h. Conducting weekly studies of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts),
i. Implementing a language dormitory program,
j. Implementing *kitab* learning like in traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren),
k. Activating a bulletin board with *nahw* schematics,
l. Finding *nahw* instructors who can explain the material in simpler terms.

6. Sharf

a. Programs that can be implemented by the PBA study program include: 1) Programs/courses for the study of Sharf; 2) Advanced Sharf learning; 3) Providing conjugation books; and 4) Increasing free time outside of lectures.

b. Programs that can be implemented by HMP include: 1) Basic Sharf learning; and 2) Sharf tutoring sessions.

c. Programs that can be implemented by lecturers include: 1) Applying a system or approach for conjugation analysis, in addition to memorization; 2) Teaching using traditional pesantren-style books; 3) Basic Sharf learning; and 4) Providing simple and easy-to-understand books on conjugation.

In addition, researchers also examined whether students themselves made efforts to overcome their difficulties in Arabic, in addition to those made by the PBA study program and HMP. This is because the most important solution to address the issue of

students' language proficiency is their own efforts. There are several activities that students do individually to strengthen their language skills. These activities include self-study beyond regular lessons, studying in small groups, tutoring, reading books, watching Arabic-language films, and others. This is illustrated in Table 5 as follows:

Table 5. Students' Efforts in Overcoming Their Problems in Arabic Language Proficiency

No	Student	Self-Study	Course	Study Group	Reading Books	Watching Video/ Youtube	Others
1	Semester I						
	45	10		9	21	1	4
2	Semester III						
	66	9	13	14	10	6	14
3	Semester V						
	81	21	11	17	3	6	13

CONCLUSION

According to their educational background, each student in the PBA study program faces difficulties in Arabic language skills and Arabic language components. Students from modern pesantren backgrounds do not experience many language difficulties. Their challenges are mainly in the language components, such as nahw and sharf. In contrast, students from traditional pesantren (salaah) face more difficulties in active language skills, particularly in speaking (kalam) and writing (ketubah). Additionally, there are students in the Arabic language study program who come from Islamic Senior High School backgrounds. They have difficulties in Arabic language skills, especially those from general education backgrounds such as high school (SMA) and vocational school (SMK). However, the students who face the most difficulties among all these educational backgrounds are those with less interest in mastering the Arabic language, as they perceive learning Arabic to be difficult. The most significant difficulty for students is speaking (kalam) skills. Students struggle to talk to Arabic on academic topics. In addition to this language skill, the most difficult aspects of the language, as acknowledged by the students, are nahw and sharf, followed by other language aspects and language skills in sequence. Factors that influence language difficulties and encourage language proficiency include interest, educational background, teaching, and methodological factors, environmental factors, student activities and engagements to enhance language skills, and other factors such as psychological and economic factors.

Efforts made by the study program to strengthen students' language skills are still limited, such as additional activities, including speaking (kalam) and reading (qiraah) practice. The Arabic Language HMP also conducts language communities, such as language workshops (daurah lughah) and competitions on Arabic language proficiency. However, these activities have not yet solved the difficulties faced by students from various educational backgrounds in the PBA study program. There are several proposed activities proposed by students and lecturers in the PBA study program to solve the difficulties students face in language proficiency. Among these suggested activities are implementing matriculation in language aspects for students with low language proficiency, creating a language-rich environment, building dormitories to support students in practicing the language more effectively, and inviting native speakers.

Proposed activities for the HMP are holding language seminars, forming an intensive language club (halaqah), organizing Arabic language debates, conducting Arabic language proficiency competitions, and scheduling regular public speaking events (muhadharah). Additionally, suggestions addressed to lecturers in the PBA study program include refreshing their skills in teaching Arabic, particularly in methodology and media usage, and engaging and inspiring teaching methods to motivate PBA students to master Arabic language proficiency.

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