Arabic Language Competency for Prospective Non-Native Preachers

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Abstract
Arabic is a cornerstone of Islamic da'wah, serving as the primary medium for understanding the sources of Islam, such as the Quran and Hadith. However, a gap in Arabic language competency among prospective non-native preachers raises concerns about how this deficiency impacts the effectiveness of their da'wah activities. This study aims to evaluate the Arabic language proficiency among prospective non-native preacher students and its relationship with the effectiveness of their da'wah efforts. A quantitative approach was employed using a questionnaire administered to 72 third-year students from the Dakwah and Leadership Studies program at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Data were analyzed using SPSS to assess Arabic proficiency levels and their correlation with da'wah effectiveness. The findings indicate that while Arabic proficiency levels are moderate, there is a significant and positive relationship between Arabic language competency and the effectiveness of da'wah. This study proposes proactive measures such as intensive training and integrating Arabic into da'wah activities to enhance the language competency of future preachers. The study also highlights avenues for further research into Arabic proficiency and its role in da'wah effectiveness.
Keywords: Arabic Language, Language Competency, Islamic Da'wah, Da'wah Effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is the language of the Quran, which is considered the divine word of God in Islam. The original text of the Quran is revered for its linguistic beauty and depth, and preaching in Arabic allows for the direct transmission of its teachings without the loss of meaning that often occurs in translation (Abdul Haleem, 2005). This is because the Arabic language itself possesses a highly captivating and comprehensive linguistic style in many aspects. From a cultural perspective, Arabic is not only a means of communication but also a rich cultural heritage that connects Muslims worldwide. Thus, preaching in Arabic indirectly fosters a shared identity among Muslims (Suleiman, 2003). Therefore, Arabic in the realm of da'wah is inseparable and serves as a fundamental support for da'wah in various fields. Moreover, Al-Azmeh (2009) states that Arabic is also the primary medium of instruction in most Islamic educational institutions for the study of religious knowledge. This further supports Islamic da'wah by emphasizing the involvement of language in religious texts and teachings.

Arabic holds a significant position in Islam. While Arabic is not exclusively a language for Muslims or the Islamic religion, it has a dominant influence in Islam. The relationship between Arabic and preachers is undeniable, as the Quran itself was revealed in Arabic. The original Quran and Hadith are in Arabic, and preachers who can

understand Arabic can directly comprehend the Quranic and Hadith texts in their original form (Muhammad Zaky, 2023).

Additionally, Arabic plays an essential role in mass media. Many religious issues and da'wah content shared in the media are in Arabic. Only audiences who are proficient in Arabic can fully understand these matters. At the same time, Arabic texts and terminologies are frequently used in religious discourse and da'wah delivery (Burhanuddin, 2024). In light of this, Hamka and Al-Zamakhshari also emphasize the importance of Arabic in socio-political and da'wah contexts (Rifqi, 2023). In socio-politics, Arabic fosters unity among Muslims through communication, whether directly or indirectly. In terms of da'wah, Arabic is crucial for understanding religious source texts, as a lack of Arabic proficiency can lead to misinterpretations of these sources. However, to what extent is Arabic truly significant for non-Arabic-speaking preachers? This research purposesm to answer what is the level of Arabic language competency among prospective non-native preachers, and how does it relate to the effectiveness of da'wah delivery? What are the suitable approaches and training methods to assist non-native Arabic-speaking preachers in enhancing their Arabic language competency? What is the correlation between Arabic language competency and the effectiveness of da'wah?

METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research approach using a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The data were gathered and analyzed through Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed to third-year students in the Dakwah and Leadership Studies program at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, selected through purposive sampling. The selected respondents had to meet the criteria of being prospective non-native Arabic-speaking preachers. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software, applying structural equation modeling to examine the relationship between Arabic proficiency and non-native preachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Arabic has a strong connection with Islamic da'wah. Without understanding Arabic, one cannot fully comprehend primary religious texts, which may result in ineffective information delivery in da'wah. Da'wah serves as a platform to guide the Muslim community towards righteousness. To achieve this, preachers must rely on authentic sources as their foundation. Common Islamic terminologies such as *Amr Ma'ruf* (enjoining good) and *Nahi Munkar* (forbidding evil) require a deep understanding of the language of the Quran. Arabic is used as a reference when accessing fundamental Islamic sources, namely the Quran and *Hadith Nabawiyyah* (Amrullah, 2023). These skills are essential for a language to function effectively. This principle applies to all languages, including Arabic. Burhanuddin (2023) outlines several reasons why mastering Arabic is crucial for Islamic da'wah: 1) Arabic is the official language of the Muslim world, enabling communication and unity across nations and facilitating the spread of information globally. 2) Learning Arabic allows Muslims to directly access original religious texts in Fiqh, Tafsir, Hadith, Akhlaq, and Tasawwuf, reducing the risk of misinterpretation. 3) Arabic is the language of Islamic civilization, and mastering it enhances one's understanding of Islamic history and culture.

Taufik (2020) also emphasizes the importance of Arabic in da'wah, stating that: 1) Arabic is widely spoken, including by non-Muslims residing in Arab countries. 2) The Quran is written in Arabic, making it essential to master branches of Quranic sciences such as Balaghah, Nahwu, Sarf, Usul al-Fiqh, Ulum al-Quran, Shariah, Hadith, and Asbab al-Nuzul. 3) Arabic serves as a key medium for preachers to communicate religious teachings effectively by correctly interpreting Islamic knowledge from the Quran and Hadith. To further illustrate the relationship between Arabic and preachers, Sayyid Qutb (1995), in his work Fiqh Dakwah, highlights four key aspects of Arabic language importance: 1) Arabic is the language of the Quran. 2) Arabic is the language of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions. 3) Arabic consists of words that use minimal letters, making comprehension and pronunciation easier. Most Arabic words are derived from three-letter roots. 3) Arabic vocabulary has unique beauty and clarity, enabling concise yet expressive communication.

Based on these insights, it is clear that Arabic competency is essential for preachers—not only to ensure their message is delivered effectively but also to engage and inspire audiences. Arabic language proficiency includes four key skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Fathoni (2021) categorizes these competencies as follows:
1. Fahmul Masmu' (Listening Skill): The ability to understand spoken Arabic.
2. Fahmul Maqru' (Reading Skill): The ability to comprehend written Arabic texts.
3. Ta'bir Syafahi (Speaking Skill): The ability to express thoughts in spoken Arabic.
4. Ta'bir Tahriri (Writing Skill): The ability to convey ideas and messages in written Arabic.

These skills are essential for a language to function effectively. This principle applies to all languages, including Arabic. According to Chomsky (1965), linguistic competence refers to an individual's ability to understand and produce language correctly. In this context, the respondents of this study, consisting of 72 prospective preachers (N=72), play a vital role in demonstrating how Arabic competency contributes to effective da'wah. As shown in Table 1, 29 respondents (40.3%) are male and 43 respondents (59.7%) are female, reflecting a balanced representation that highlights the importance of Arabic proficiency among both genders in preparing for their da'wah responsibilities.

Table 1. The Total Number Of Respondents

Gender	Male	29	40.3%
	Female	43	59.7%
Total		72	100%
Highest Level of Education	STPM	23	31.9%
	STAM	25	34.7%
	DIPLOMA	24	33.3
Total		72	100%
Frequency of Using Arabic in Daily Activities	Very Frequently	0	0%
	Frequently	1	1.4%
	Occasionally	27	37.5%
	Rarely	35	48.6%
	Never	9	12.5%
Total		72	100%
Arabic Courses Taken at University	Arabic Practical (PPPY1012)	64/72	88.9%
	Basic Academic Arabic (PPPY1022)	70/72	97.2%
	Advanced Academic Arabic (PPPY2012)	68/72	94.4%
	Career Arabic (PPPY3012)	3/72	4.2%

Based on Table 1, it can be observed that nearly 60% of the respondents who completed the survey are female students, while the remaining 40% are male students. In terms of the highest level of education, the distribution is balanced, with approximately one-third of students coming from STAM, STPM, and Diploma backgrounds. Among the 72 students, only 1.4% reported frequently using Arabic, while 27 students (37.5%) use it occasionally, 35 students (48.6%) use it rarely, and 9 students (12.5%) never use it. In terms of their educational background in Arabic, the majority of students from the Dakwah and Leadership Studies program have prior experience studying Arabic at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

Table 2. Level of Arabic Language Competency

Question	N Stat	Range Stat	Min	Max	Sum	Stat	Std. Error	Std. Dev	Vari Stat
To what extent do you feel confident reading texts in Arabic?	72	3	1	4	181	2.51	071	605	366
To what extent do you understand the content of Arabic texts directly without translation?	72	3	1	4	143	1.99	070	593	352
To what extent can you write Arabic texts for preaching purposes?	72	3	1	4	146	2.03	084	712	506
To what extent can you understand speeches or sermons in Arabic directly?	72	3	1	4	140	1.94	081	690	476
To what extent are you able to speak Arabic during preaching sessions?	72	2	1	3	127	1.76	075	639	408
How often do you use Arabic in daily life or during preaching practice?	72	3	1	4	131	1.82	072	613	375
To what extent do you consider yourself capable of using Arabic terminology when preaching to the public?	72	2	1	3	132	1.83	069	581	338
To what extent are you capable of understanding interpretations of the Quran and Hadith through Arabic texts?	72	3	1	4	148	2.06	076	648	419
To what extent can you refer to original Arabic sources when preparing for preaching?	72	3	1	4	147	2.04	089	759	576
To what extent do you feel that Arabic fluency can open opportunities for preaching at the international level?	72	3	1	4	192	2.67	114	964	930
Valid N (listwise)	72								

Table 3. Overall Distribution of Arabic Language Competency Level Means

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overallmeans	72	1.00	3.60	2.0653	45134
Valid N (listwise)	72				

Table above presents the data distribution obtained after being analyzed using SPSS software. The response range of respondents is on a scale of 3. This is further supported by the mean for each question, which ranges from 1.82 to 2.67. The standard deviation observed is between 0.581 and 0.964, while the variance is between 0.338 and 0.930. The total mean is estimated to fall within a very weak to weak competency range when multiplied by 100%. Furthermore, Table 3 shows that the overall mean score for

Arabic language competency is 2.0653, which falls under the weak level. The estimated scale for Arabic language competency is 2.0653 – 0.4513 to 2.0653 + 0.4513, which is approximately between 1.614 and 2.5166.

Table 4. The Relationship Between Arabic Language Competency and the Effectiveness of Da'wah

Question	N Stat	Range Stat	Min	Max	Sum Stat	Stat	Std. Error	Std. Dev	Vari Stat
I feel that proficiency in Arabic influences my self-confidence during preaching	72	3	1	4	211	2.93	0.100	0.845	0.713
I feel that the audience is more confident in my delivery if I can use Arabic.	72	3	1	4	210	2.92	0.102	0.868	0.754
I believe that proficiency in Arabic adds more value to my role as a preacher.	72	3	1	4	241	3.35	0.089	0.754	0.568
I feel that proficiency in Arabic helps me convey religious messages accurately.	72	3	1	4	234	3.25	0.094	0.801	0.641
I feel that fluency in Arabic allows me to interact more effectively with Arabic speakers.	72	3	1	4	239	3.32	0.086	0.728	0.530
I believe that preachers who are proficient in Arabic can understand religious texts more deeply.	72	3	1	4	237	3.29	0.094	0.795	0.632
I believe my preaching will be more impactful if I am more proficient in Arabic.	72	3	1	4	230	3.19	0.090	0.762	0.581
I feel that proficiency in Arabic enables me to answer religious questions from Arabic-speaking audiences more effectively.	72	3	1	4	230	3.19	0.078	0.664	0.441
I am confident that my ability to speak Arabic makes my preaching more engaging for the audience.	72	3	1	4	232	3.22	0.087	0.736	0.541
I believe that fluency in Arabic makes me a more effective preacher at the global level.	72	3	1	4	235	3.26	0.084	0.712	0.507
Valid N (listwise)	72								

Table 5. Relationship Between Arabic Competency and the Effectiveness of Da'wah

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overallmeans	72	1.00	4.00	3.1931	62851
Valid N (listwise)	72				

Referring to Table 4, the response scale range is at level 3. Meanwhile, the mean for each survey question is also around 3, with the lowest mean recorded at 2.92 and the highest at 3.32. The standard deviation ranges from 0.664 (lowest) to 0.868 (highest), while the variance ranges between 0.441 and 0.754. Table 5 further illustrates that the overall mean for the relationship between Arabic competency and the effectiveness of da'wah is at a good level, scoring 3.191. The overall standard deviation is 0.62851. This indicates that the estimated scale score ranges from 2.56249 (3.191 - 0.62851) to 3.81951 (3.191 + 0.62851). This means the relationship between Arabic competency and the effectiveness of da'wah falls within the range of weak to very good, approaching a scale score of 4.

Table 6, Differences Between Arabic Language Competency and the Relationship Between Arabic Language Competency and Preaching Effectiveness

Item	Arabic Language Competency Value	Value of the Relationship Between Arabic Language Competency and Preaching Effectiveness
Students	72	72
Mean	2.0653	3.1931
Standard Deviation	0.45134	0.62851

Based on Table 6, the mean values between Arabic language competency and the relationship between Arabic language competency and preaching effectiveness can be observed. The mean value for Arabic language competency is 2.0653 with a standard deviation of 0.45134. Meanwhile, the mean value for the relationship between Arabic language competency and preaching effectiveness is 3.1931 with a standard deviation of 0.62851. If this scale is multiplied by 100%, the mean value for Arabic language competency is 51.6325%, while the value for the relationship between Arabic language competency and preaching effectiveness is 79.8275%. The Arabic language competency of third-year students in the Da'wah and Leadership Studies program is observed at a moderate level, whereas the relationship between Arabic language competency and preaching effectiveness has a strong connection, with a value of 79.8275%, which rounds up to 80%. This represents a significant gap of 28.195%.

Thus, the Arabic language competency of future preachers has not yet reached the necessary level expected of them. Moreover, the relationship between Arabic language competency and preaching effectiveness has a strong value and correlation in the field of preaching. This issue needs to be taken seriously to help students improve their Arabic language competency. The following strategies are proposed to enhance Arabic language competency for future preachers:

1. Lecturers, teachers, and academics should use Arabic as a medium of communication during classroom interactions.
2. Strengthen students' Arabic reading skills by engaging with Arabic sources on da'wah.
3. Encourage students to frequently apply Arabic in da'wah, either fully or partially, in aspects such as writing, speaking, reading, and listening.
4. Organize collaborative programs between Da'wah and Leadership Studies and Arabic and Islamic Civilization Studies, such as camps, courses, and workshops.

By implementing these steps, future preachers will be able to enhance their Arabic language competency, ensuring its effective use in the field of da'wah.

CONCLUSION

The Arabic language plays a highly significant role in Islamic preaching (da'wah) as it is the primary medium for understanding the original sources of the religion, such as the Quran and Hadith. This study found that the Arabic language competency among future preachers who are non-native speakers is at a moderate level. However, the relationship between Arabic language proficiency and the effectiveness of preaching shows positive and significant results. The evident gap between the level of Arabic competency and its effectiveness in da'wah calls for proactive measures to enhance this skill. Strengthening the Arabic proficiency of future preachers is critical to ensuring that the message of Islam is conveyed accurately, clearly, and effectively. Steps such as practicing Arabic in daily communication, organizing intensive training programs, and encouraging the integration of Arabic in da'wah activities should be implemented immediately. This study also opens the door for further research, such as evaluating the

effectiveness of Arabic language training in shaping high-quality preachers or exploring the best approaches to overcoming the challenges faced by non-native speakers in da'wah. Through collective efforts, Arabic language proficiency can be improved, thereby strengthening the role of preachers in delivering the message of Islam effectively to the global community.

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