



The Role of Linguistic Capital in The Social Mobility of Arabic Language Education Students: A Mixed-Methods Sociolinguistic Study

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Abstract

Community-based development positions language as a strategic resource; however, within Islamic higher education, Arabic language proficiency is still primarily viewed as a communicative competence rather than as linguistic capital that contributes to students' social mobility. This study aims to analyze the role of linguistic capital in the social mobility of students in the Arabic Language Education study program. Employing a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, the researchers distributed Google Form questionnaires to 17 students in their fourth to sixth semesters and conducted in-depth interviews with five students. Descriptive results show that overall linguistic capital was categorized as high ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.03$), with self-confidence in using Arabic recording the highest mean ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.83$), whereas the frequency of Arabic use on campus was the lowest ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.06$). Qualitative findings indicate that linguistic capital does not directly generate social mobility, but gains value through recognition and legitimation within the higher education field, enabling its conversion into symbolic capital and subsequently into social and economic capital. These conversions are associated with academic achievement, academic identity, networking, further-study opportunities, and career prospects, although their effects vary across social arenas. The study proposes an empirically grounded conceptual model in which habitus formation facilitates linguistic capital accumulation, legitimation as symbolic capital, and subsequent conversion into social and economic capital, thereby providing a contextual sociolinguistic explanation of students' social mobility in Islamic higher education.

Keywords: Linguistic Capital, Social Mobility, Sociolinguistics, Arabic Language Education

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INTRODUCTION | مقدمة

The development of a knowledge-based society has transformed language from merely a tool of communication into a strategic resource with social, cultural, and economic value (Huot et al., 2020). In various aspects of life, proficiency in a particular language not only facilitates interaction but also influences access to education, employment opportunities, professional networks, and social recognition (Alshehri & AlShabeb, 2023; Zschomler, 2019). Contemporary sociolinguistic perspectives view language as a social practice closely linked to the distribution of power, status, and opportunities in society (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Thus, language proficiency can serve as an asset that gives individuals a competitive advantage in attaining and maintaining social status (Holborow, 2021).

In the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, the Arabic language has distinct

characteristics compared to other foreign languages because it serves academic, religious, and professional functions simultaneously (Shidiq et al., 2023). For students in the Arabic Language Education Program, proficiency in Arabic is a prerequisite for understanding Islamic literature, participating in academic activities, and taking part in various organizational and community service activities (Rusli et al., 2024). In addition, these skills also open up opportunities to earn scholarships, participate in international academic programs, work as a tutor or translator, and pursue careers that require Arabic language proficiency (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2026; Sausa, 2025). This situation indicates that proficiency in Arabic has the potential to yield various benefits that go beyond its communicative function, thereby holding strategic value in shaping students' social standing (Bassiouny & Walters, 2020).

This phenomenon can be explained through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital. Within this framework, language is understood as part of cultural capital that possesses symbolic value and can be converted into various forms of advantage when recognized within a particular social arena (Bourdieu, 1991). Language proficiency not only reflects mastery of linguistic aspects but also confers legitimacy, prestige, and access to valuable resources (Hassemer & Garrido, 2020). The higher a community's regard for a particular language, the greater the chances for those who possess that language proficiency to gain recognition, expand their social networks, and improve their social standing. Therefore, the concept of linguistic capital provides a relevant framework for understanding the relationship between Arabic language proficiency and students' social mobility (Boutet et al., 2025; Sawwan, 2025).

Studies on Arabic from a sociolinguistic perspective have evolved to encompass a range of research foci. Several studies indicate that the use of Arabic not only serves as a means of communication but also plays a role in shaping the religious, social, and cultural identities of its speakers (Aditya et al., 2025; Muttakin et al., 2026; Qassem et al., 2025). Meanwhile, research in the context of higher education shows that proficiency in Arabic contributes to improving students' linguistic and communicative skills, supports the effectiveness of the learning process, and strengthens the internalization of Islamic values in academic activities (Arifin et al., 2024; Ghufuron et al., 2025; Gonzalez-Dogan, 2022). These research findings provide insight into the role of Arabic in academic settings but do not yet explore its connection to students' social mobility in depth.

Nevertheless, several areas of research still need exploration. First, sociolinguistic studies of Arabic still primarily focus on the role of language in shaping religious, social, and cultural identities within communities; consequently, they have not yet adequately explained how Arabic functions as a resource that shapes social status in higher education. Second, research in Arabic language education still tends to position Arabic proficiency as a competency or learning outcome, and thus has not yet explained how this competency gains legitimacy as linguistic capital and is converted into symbolic, social, or economic capital that contributes to students' social mobility. These gaps highlight the need for research that explains the mechanisms by which Arabic language proficiency is converted into various forms of social advantage that contribute to students' social mobility.

Preliminary observations conducted in the Arabic Language Education Program at IAIH Hamzanwadi NW, East Lombok, revealed that Arabic language proficiency occupies a distinctive position within students' academic and social lives. Unlike institutions that formally require the daily use of Arabic, students at IAIH Hamzanwadi NW are not obligated to communicate in Arabic in all campus activities. Nevertheless, many students actively use Arabic in academic

presentations, student organizations, religious discussions, competitions, teaching practicums, and community engagement programs. These students are often entrusted with roles such as presenters, moderators, peer tutors, and delegates in Arabic-related activities. As a result, Arabic proficiency becomes associated with academic recognition, self-confidence, and access to various opportunities. These initial observations indicate that Arabic functions not merely as a communicative competence but as a valued resource that contributes to students' visibility and participation within the academic arena.

The selection of IAIH Hamzanwadi NW as the research site was based on its distinctive academic ecosystem, which provides multiple opportunities to legitimize linguistic capital. The institution is closely connected to the broader Hamzanwadi educational tradition, supported by networks of pesantren, Islamic organizations, da'wah activities, Arabic competitions, and community service programs. Although the campus does not impose a formal Arabic-speaking environment, it offers various academic and extracurricular spaces in which Arabic competence can be demonstrated and socially recognized. Consequently, students who possess stronger Arabic proficiency may gain symbolic recognition, expand their academic networks, and access broader educational and professional opportunities. This context makes IAIH Hamzanwadi NW a particularly relevant setting for examining how linguistic capital is accumulated, legitimized, and converted into symbolic, social, and economic capital that contributes to social mobility.

Although various studies have highlighted the contribution of Arabic language proficiency to learning, few have explored the mechanisms by which this proficiency is converted into symbolic, social, and economic capital from a Bourdieuan perspective. This study does not view Arabic language proficiency merely as a learning outcome but as linguistic capital that gains legitimacy within the higher education arena and is converted into symbolic, social, and economic capital. This study also offers a conceptual model explaining how linguistic capital is converted into a resource for the social mobility of Arabic Language Education students at Islamic universities.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the role of linguistic capital in shaping the social mobility of Arabic Language Education students in Islamic higher education. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, the study investigates how Arabic language proficiency acquires legitimacy within the academic field and how that legitimacy is converted into symbolic, social, and economic capital. The study pays particular attention to the mechanisms through which linguistic capital is recognized, valued, and mobilized across academic and social practices. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study proposes a contextual conceptual model that explains how Arabic linguistic capital contributes to students' academic, social, and professional mobility.

METHOD

منهج

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design to examine how linguistic capital contributes to the social mobility of Arabic Language Education students at IAIH Hamzanwadi NW, East Lombok. The design was selected because the study sought not only to identify patterns in students' perceptions of linguistic capital and social mobility but also to explain the social processes underlying those patterns through students' lived experiences and practices. The study was conducted in the Arabic Language Education Program, where Arabic proficiency is practiced across formal learning, academic presentations, student organizations, competitions, teaching practicums, religious activities, and community engagement. The quantitative phase preceded the qualitative phase, with the latter specifically

designed to elaborate and contextualize the patterns identified in the survey. This sequential structure also supported the reconstruction of a contextual model explaining how linguistic capital is accumulated, recognized, and converted into symbolic, social, and economic capital within the higher education field.

The quantitative population comprised all active students in semesters IV–VI of the Arabic Language Education Program. Criterion-based total sampling was employed, whereby all students who met the predetermined inclusion criteria were included in the quantitative phase. The criteria required students to have completed most of the Arabic language skills courses, possess basic Arabic communication skills, have experience using Arabic in academic or organizational activities, and be willing to participate in the study. Based on these criteria, 17 students met the requirements and constituted the entire quantitative sample. The qualitative phase subsequently employed purposive sampling to select five informants from among the survey participants. Selection was based on variations in linguistic capital identified from the quantitative results, representing high, moderate, and low levels, while also considering organizational involvement, academic experience, and the intensity of Arabic language use. This procedure was intended to capture diverse experiences of how Arabic proficiency was practiced, recognized, and mobilized across different academic and social contexts.

Data were collected using a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol developed from Bourdieu's conceptualization of linguistic, symbolic, social, and economic capital. The questionnaire examined students' perceptions of Arabic proficiency, its recognition within the academic environment, and its perceived contribution to academic, social, and professional opportunities. The interview protocol explored four interconnected areas: students' experiences in acquiring and using Arabic, forms of academic and social recognition associated with their Arabic competence, opportunities generated through Arabic proficiency, and perceptions of its contribution to social mobility. Two faculty members with expertise in Arabic language education and research methodology reviewed both instruments to assess item relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study constructs, and revisions were made accordingly. Given the exploratory-descriptive purpose of the quantitative phase and the small criterion-based sample, the questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively rather than through inferential statistical procedures. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The accuracy of the transcripts was checked against the original recordings, while the interpretation of participants' accounts was repeatedly compared with the transcripts to maintain consistency between the empirical narratives and the emerging themes.

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to identify patterns across the dimensions of linguistic capital, symbolic capital, social capital, economic capital, and social mobility. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns concerning the acquisition, use, recognition, and conversion of Arabic linguistic capital. The two datasets were integrated using a weaving strategy consistent with the explanatory sequential design. Specifically, quantitative findings guided the selection of qualitative informants and identified patterns requiring further explanation; qualitative accounts were then connected to the corresponding quantitative findings during the interpretation stage to explain, confirm, or elaborate those patterns. Rather than treating the two datasets as separate sources of evidence, the analysis brought them together around a common analytical thread: how Arabic proficiency moves from an individual competence to a socially recognized resource and, subsequently, to other forms of capital. The integrated findings were then synthesized through Bourdieu's framework of habitus, field, and capital to reconstruct a

conceptual model of linguistic capital conversion and its contribution to students' social mobility.

RESULT | نتائج

The Construction of Linguistic Capital Among Arabic Language Education Students in the Academic Arena

The analysis shows that students' linguistic capital in the Arabic Language Education Program falls into the high category, although there are variations across indicators. Most students can use Arabic in academic activities, supported by a high level of self-confidence; however, the frequency of Arabic use in daily interactions remains relatively limited. In this study, linguistic capital was measured through five indicators: speaking, reading, writing, translating, and communicating in Arabic in academic activities

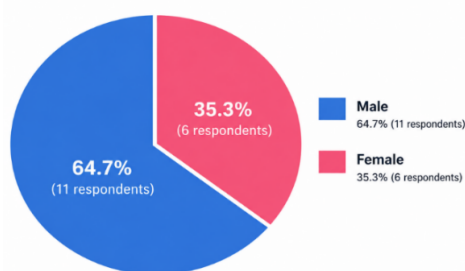


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Figure 1 shows the characteristics of the respondents by gender. Of the total 17 respondents, 64.7% were male students, while 35.3% were female students. This composition indicates that the study participants were predominantly male students. However, this study does not aim to compare Arabic language proficiency based on gender but rather to examine how linguistic capital is constructed within the academic environment of Arabic language education students in general.

Table 1. Distribution of Student Responses Regarding Arabic Language Proficiency

Scale	Category	Speaking Skills f (%)	Reading Skills f (%)	Writing Skills f (%)
1	Strongly Disagree	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)
2	Disagree	0 (0,0)	1 (5,9)	1 (5,9)
3	Netral	2 (11,8)	3 (17,6)	4 (23,5)
4	Agree	8 (47,1)	8 (47,1)	7 (41,2)
5	Strongly Agree	7 (41,2)	5 (29,4)	5 (29,4)
Total		17 (100)	17 (100)	17 (100)

Furthermore, the results of the first indicator show that most students already possess good Arabic-speaking skills. Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents selected the "agree" (47.1%) and "strongly agree" (41.2%) categories, indicating that speaking ability has become a competency among most students. This suggests that the learning process in the Arabic Language Education Program has successfully fostered students' confidence and fluency in using Arabic as a means of communication.

Relatively similar results were also observed regarding the ability to read Arabic texts. Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents again selected the "agree" category (47.1%) and "strongly agree" (29.4%), while only a small proportion gave neutral or "disagree" ratings. These findings indicate that students have developed the ability to comprehend various Arabic-

language texts as a result of a learning process focused on mastering Arabic literature. This reading ability is a crucial component of linguistic capital, as it enables students to access diverse sources of knowledge, broaden their academic horizons, and enhance their standing in higher education.

Furthermore, Arabic writing skills, as shown in Table 1, also demonstrate a positive trend. The majority of respondents fell into the “agree” (41.2%) and “strongly agree” (29.4%) categories, although some students chose the “neutral” category. These findings indicate that writing skills have developed quite well, though they still require further strengthening, as writing is a productive skill that demands mastery of grammar and vocabulary, as well as the ability to organize ideas systematically. In the context of linguistic capital, writing skills not only reflect mastery of linguistic aspects but also serve as academic capital, enhancing students’ credibility across various scholarly activities.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Linguistic Capital

Indicator	Mean	SD	Category
Ability to communicate in Arabic in academic activities	3.35	0.79	Moderate
Frequency of using Arabic on campus	3.00	1.06	Moderate
Self-confidence in using Arabic	4.06	0.83	High
Participation in Arabic-related activities	3.24	1.15	Moderate
Overall Linguistic Capital	3.41	1.03	High

Based on Table 2, the indicator of confidence in using Arabic received the highest mean score ($M = 4.06$; $SD = 0.83$), while the frequency of Arabic use on campus received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 1.06$). These findings indicate that students have a fairly high level of confidence in their Arabic language proficiency, but opportunities and habits for using it in daily communication remain limited. Meanwhile, communication skills in academic activities and participation in Arabic-language activities fall into the moderate to high categories, suggesting that language proficiency is utilized more frequently in specific academic situations than in everyday social interactions.

The interview results provide an explanation for this trend. Most informants reported that their Arabic proficiency developed not only through lectures but also through learning experiences at Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), muhādatsah activities, student organizations, and practice giving Arabic presentations. One informant stated that giving presentations in Arabic boosts self-confidence when participating in seminars or competitions, while another explained that involvement in organizations provides an important space to practice communication more actively. However, the informants also acknowledged that the use of Arabic outside specific activities remains relatively limited, as everyday communication on campus predominantly uses Indonesian or regional languages. These findings explain why the self-confidence indicator scored high, while Arabic use frequency remains in the moderate category.

The Legitimacy of Arabic Language Proficiency as Symbolic Capital on Campus

The results of this study indicate that linguistic capital does not automatically yield social benefits but requires recognition from the academic community as a form of legitimization of one’s competencies. Such recognition is a manifestation of symbolic capital, that is, the value bestowed by the social community, so that proficiency in Arabic can enhance students’ social standing and recognition within the higher education arena. For students in the Arabic Language Education program, this symbolic capital is reflected in increased self-confidence in social

interactions, a sense of themselves as individuals with superior competence, and the strengthening of their academic identity, built through their mastery of Arabic.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Symbolic Capital

Indicator	Mean	SD	Category
Academic achievement through Arabic proficiency	3.65	1.11	High
Feeling superior because of Arabic proficiency	3.18	0.95	Moderate
Arabic as an academic and social identity	3.47	0.94	High
Overall Symbolic Capital	3.43	1.02	High

Table 2 shows that the academic achievement indicator supported by Arabic language proficiency received the highest mean score ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 1.11$). This finding indicates that students perceive tangible benefits from their mastery of Arabic, including better understanding of literature, better ability to follow lectures, greater participation in academic competitions, and completion of various coursework assignments. Conversely, the indicator of feeling more valued than other students received the lowest average score ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 0.95$) and remained in the moderate category. These results suggest that Arabic language proficiency is not yet fully perceived as a primary factor determining students' social standing, as academic achievement is also influenced by organizational experience, leadership, interpersonal skills, and non-linguistic achievements. Meanwhile, the indicator of Arabic as an academic and social identity scored an average of 3.47 ($SD = 0.94$), indicating that proficiency in Arabic is beginning to serve as a distinguishing characteristic for Arabic Language Education students within the academic environment. Therefore, the high scores on the academic identity indicator suggest that Arabic is beginning to function not only as a communication tool but also as a symbol of scholarship, reflecting the academic character of Arabic Language Education students. In other words, proficiency in Arabic has become part of the identity that distinguishes these students from other academic groups.

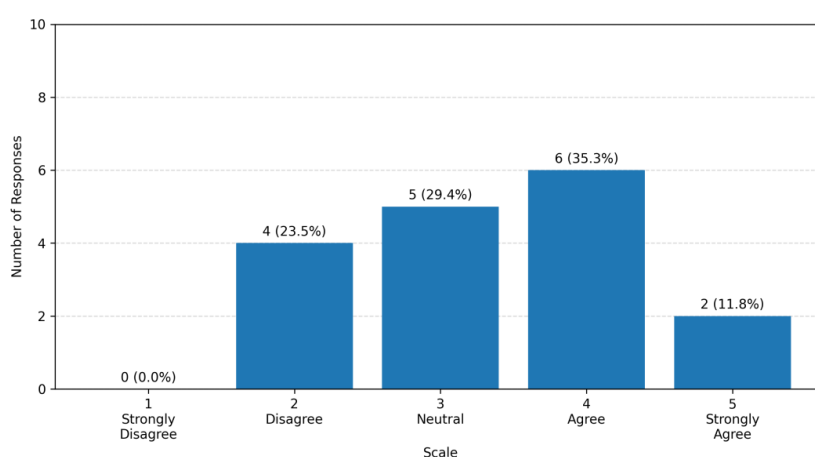


Figure 2. Students' Perceptions of Arabic as an Academic Identity

This trend is reinforced by the distribution of responses in Figure 2, which shows that the majority of respondents agreed (47.1%) or strongly agreed (29.4%) that Arabic language proficiency shapes their academic identity. These quantitative findings are consistent with the interview results. Several informants reported that their proficiency in Arabic led them to be entrusted with roles such as moderator, presenter, facilitator of academic activities, or participant in various Arabic-related competitions. These experiences demonstrate that Arabic

language proficiency not only provides academic benefits but also earns recognition from faculty and peers, thereby strengthening their identity as Arabic Language Education students.

Overall, the research results indicate that Arabic language proficiency has gained legitimacy as symbolic capital within the university environment, although the degree of recognition still varies among students. This recognition serves as a crucial step toward translating Arabic language proficiency into broader benefits, such as expanding academic networks, increasing professional opportunities, and other social advantages. Therefore, symbolic capital acts as a bridge between Arabic language proficiency and its conversion into social and economic capital.

The Practice of Arabic as a Tool for Students' Social Mobility

The results of this study indicate that the contribution of linguistic capital to students' social mobility is reflected not only in language proficiency but also in its conversion into social and economic capital. An analysis was conducted to identify the extent to which proficiency in Arabic is perceived to provide benefits in both academic and professional life. The dimensions analyzed include opportunities to secure positions within organizations, expand academic and social networks, obtain scholarships or pursue further studies, and secure future employment. The results of the descriptive analysis of these two dimensions are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Social and Economic Capital

Indicator	Mean	SD	Category
Opportunities to obtain organizational positions	2.88	0.99	Moderate
Expansion of academic and social networks	3.12	1.11	Moderate
Opportunities for scholarships or further study	3.88	0.93	High
Better future employment opportunities	3.88	0.86	High
Overall Social Capital	3.00	1.15	Moderate
Overall Economic Capital	3.97	0.83	High

Based on Table 3, economic capital scored higher on average ($M = 3.97$; $SD = 0.83$) than social capital ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 1.15$). These findings indicate that students perceive greater benefits from Arabic language proficiency in the form of opportunities for further study and career prospects than in terms of expanding their academic networks or securing positions in student organizations.

When examined by each indicator, the opportunities to obtain scholarships or pursue further studies, as well as better job prospects, received the highest average score ($M = 3.88$), indicating that students view Arabic language proficiency as a competency of strategic value for career development. Conversely, the indicator for the opportunity to secure a position in student organizations received the lowest average score ($M = 2.88$), while the expansion of academic and social networks fell into the moderate category ($M = 3.12$). These results indicate that the benefits of Arabic are more readily felt in aspects of academic and professional development, while the formation of social networks and organizational leadership is still influenced by other competencies beyond language proficiency.

The difference in scores between social capital and economic capital holds significant implications for the capital conversion process. These findings suggest that linguistic capital is more easily converted into economic capital than into social capital. This means that students experience the benefits of Arabic more quickly in the form of job opportunities and further study than in expanded social networks or improved organizational standing. This suggests that each form of capital has a distinct conversion mechanism depending on the characteristics of the arena in which that competency is applied.

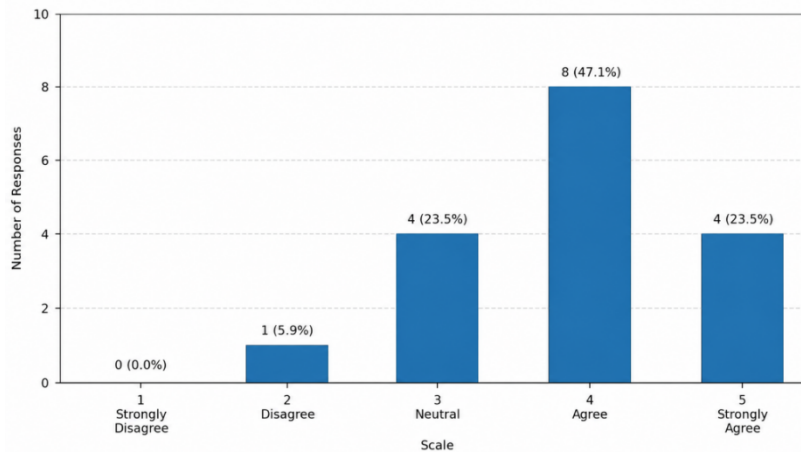


Figure 3. Students' Perceptions of Employment Opportunities Based on Their Arabic Language Skills

This trend is reinforced by the distribution of responses in Figure 3, which shows that 70.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that proficiency in Arabic improves future employment opportunities, while only 29.4% gave a neutral response or disagreed. This distribution of responses indicates that perceptions of Arabic's economic benefits are stronger than those of its social benefits. This indicates that students view Arabic language proficiency as an investment in competencies that can yield professional benefits after completing their education. Most informants also stated that Arabic language proficiency provides opportunities to become a tutor, teach at educational institutions, participate in da'wah programs, or obtain information about scholarships and job opportunities. These statements from the informants suggest that the legitimacy of Arabic language proficiency is shaped not only through formal learning processes but also through social experiences within organizations and academic forums. These findings show that academic habitus is an important factor in capital conversion. However, as illustrated in Figure 2 below, Arabic language proficiency is not always the primary factor in securing leadership positions on campus.

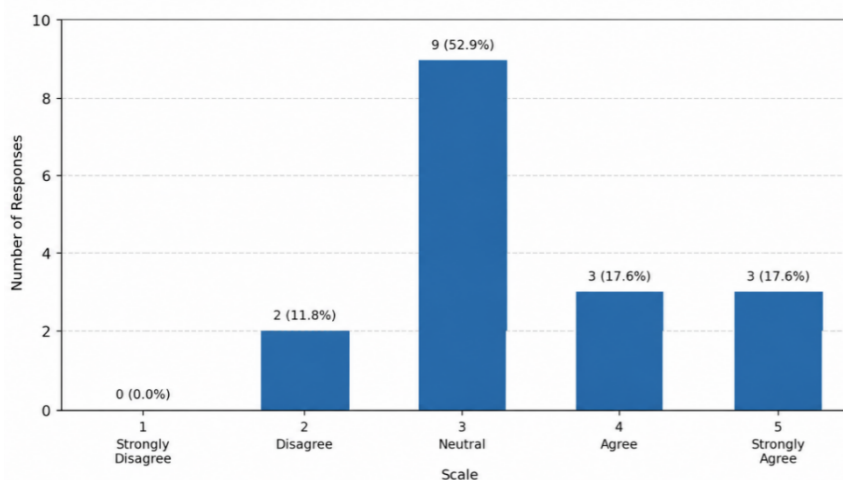


Figure 4. Students' Perceptions of Opportunities to Obtain Positions in Organizations

This is evident in Figure 4, where only 23.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Arabic language proficiency helps in obtaining certain positions within campus organizations. In contrast, 41.2% of respondents gave a neutral response, and 35.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This distribution indicates that advancement in academic status and organizational leadership is not solely determined by Arabic language proficiency but is also influenced by other

factors such as leadership skills, interpersonal skills, organizational experience, and non-linguistic achievements. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the value of a competency is determined not only by the level of language proficiency but also by the mechanisms of legitimation and capital conversion that occur within each social arena.

A Model for the Conversion of Linguistic Capital into Social Mobility Among College Students

The research findings indicate that the relationship between Arabic language proficiency and students' social mobility is not linear. The results of both quantitative analysis and interviews show that Arabic language proficiency initially develops through the learning process, organizational experiences, the pesantren environment, and academic communication practices that shape students' linguistic habitus. This habitus subsequently generates linguistic capital—that is, Arabic language proficiency valued within the Arabic Language Education program. However, mastery of Arabic alone is insufficient to elevate students' social standing if that proficiency has not yet been recognized in higher education.

Recognition of Arabic language proficiency is a crucial stage in the capital conversion process. The research findings indicate that students who actively use Arabic in presentations, scholarly discussions, organizational activities, and other academic endeavors achieve higher levels of self-confidence, build a stronger academic identity, and gain recognition from faculty members and peers. These conditions indicate that linguistic capital has gained legitimacy as symbolic capital. This recognition then becomes a prerequisite for students to expand their social networks, gain opportunities to participate in various academic activities, and build a better reputation within the university community.

The next stage is the conversion of symbolic capital into various forms of social benefits. This study shows that students who gain recognition for their Arabic language proficiency have greater opportunities to improve their academic performance, understand Islamic literature, expand their academic networks, secure teaching opportunities, and enhance their future employment prospects. However, Arabic language proficiency does not always influence all aspects of social mobility. Students' low perception of Arabic's contribution to securing organizational positions or advancing academic status indicates that the conversion of capital is heavily influenced by the characteristics of the arena in which these competencies are exchanged. Thus, successful social mobility is determined not only by mastery of Arabic but also by students' ability to leverage these competencies in accordance with the demands of academic and social arenas.

Based on a synthesis of all findings, this study reconstructs a conceptual model that explains how students' social mobility results from a gradual process of capital conversion. This model demonstrates that habitus shapes linguistic capital through educational processes and social experiences. Linguistic capital then gains legitimacy as symbolic capital when recognized within the higher education arena. Furthermore, symbolic capital is converted into social capital through the expansion of academic and professional networks, and into economic capital through increased employment opportunities and professional activities. This conversion between forms of capital ultimately results in students' social mobility. This model was developed in accordance with Pierre Bourdieu's theory in sociolinguistic studies, showing that Arabic in Islamic universities functions not only as a tool for communication and learning but also as a strategic resource that shapes students' social positions through recognition, legitimation, and capital conversion.



Figure 5. Model of Linguistic Capital Conversion Leading to Students' Social Mobility

This model shows that linguistic capital does not directly lead to social mobility. Proficiency in Arabic must first be legitimized within the higher education system before it can be converted into symbolic, social, and economic capital. Thus, the sociolinguistic conceptual model developed here can explain the mechanisms by which students' linguistic capital in Arabic language education is converted within the context of Islamic universities.

DISCUSSION | مناقشة

The findings of this study indicate that Arabic language proficiency among students in the Arabic Language Education Program has evolved beyond its communicative function to become a social resource of strategic value in the higher education environment (Mustafawi et al., 2022). These conditions indicate that Arabic language proficiency gains meaning through academic practice, which enables students to build a reputation, gain recognition, and access various educational and professional opportunities (Pennycook, 2010). These findings are consistent with various studies that show that language proficiency not only contributes to academic success but also plays a role in identity formation, enhancing competitiveness, and expanding career opportunities (Al Sharoufi & Al-Kandari, 2025; Barnawi, 2022; Haisraeli, 2025; Trentman, 2017). Thus, this study shows that the benefits of Arabic extend beyond the learning process and serve as a resource that can enhance students' social standing in the academic environment (Chen & Starobin, 2019).

These findings can be explained by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, which holds that capital has value and yields benefits only when it gains legitimacy or recognition within a social arena. Thus, proficiency in Arabic is viewed not only as a linguistic competency but also as a resource that can be converted into various other forms of capital when recognized and valued by both academic and social circles (Bourdieu, 1991). In this study, the higher education arena serves as a space of legitimation that determines whether Arabic language proficiency can be converted into social capital. Activities such as academic presentations, class discussions, competitions, student organizations, and academic interactions serve as mechanisms that legitimize Arabic language proficiency (Nawaz, 2025). Therefore, students' social mobility is not determined solely by their level of language proficiency, but by their ability to apply that proficiency in academic practices recognized by the higher education community (López Blanco, 2025; Shahrokni, 2020). These findings underscore that the relationship between linguistic capital and social mobility occurs through a process of legitimation before giving rise to other forms of capital.

The findings of this study reinforce various previous studies showing that language proficiency contributes to the formation of academic identity and the expansion of educational and career opportunities (Alshammari et al., 2023; Bhar & Chua, 2025). However, this study offers a more comprehensive perspective by framing Arabic language proficiency as linguistic capital that undergoes a process of conversion into symbolic capital, social capital, and economic capital (Nimer, 2021; Roth, 2019). This perspective broadens the sociolinguistic study of Arabic language education, which has thus far focused primarily on improving language proficiency by demonstrating that the strategic value of the Arabic language is determined not only by the level of proficiency but also by students' ability to apply that proficiency in various academic settings that confer social legitimacy (Mouassine & Fatmi, 2025; Parmeggiani, 2021).

Equally important is the fact that the process of capital conversion varies depending on the form of capital. This study shows that proficiency in Arabic is more likely to lead to opportunities for further study and better job prospects than expanding one's social network or obtaining a leadership position in a student organization (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2026; Sonnenschein & Wiik, 2025). These conditions indicate that each arena rewards linguistic capital through different mechanisms. Professional arenas tend to place a higher value on Arabic language proficiency because it is directly related to the needs of the workplace, whereas organizational arenas are more influenced by a combination of other forms of capital, such as organizational experience, interpersonal skills, leadership, and the trust of organizational members (Akhirudin et al., 2025; Al-Rojaie, 2023; Karim & Mohsin, 2025; Khoumikhham, 2026). These findings show that the effectiveness of linguistic capital is contextual; therefore, not all forms of social mobility can be achieved solely through proficiency in Arabic.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of sociolinguistic research based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital by demonstrating that linguistic capital functions not only as cultural capital inherent to individuals, but also as a resource that undergoes a dynamic process of conversion through mechanisms of legitimation within the arena of higher education (Bourdieu, 1991). These findings expand the application of Bourdieu's theory in Arabic language education by showing that the effectiveness of linguistic capital largely depends on the interaction among habitus, field, and social recognition before it can generate symbolic, social, or economic capital. Thus, this study not only confirms the relevance of Bourdieu's theory for explaining the relationship between language and social mobility but also offers a more contextual account of the mechanisms of linguistic capital conversion among Arabic-language education students at Islamic universities (Boutet et al., 2025). This contribution develops a conceptual model of the conversion of linguistic capital into social mobility, reconstructing the stages of habitus formation, the accumulation of linguistic capital, the process of legitimization as symbolic capital, and its conversion into social and economic capital, ultimately leading to social mobility. This model complements previous studies, which generally focused only on the direct relationship between Arabic language proficiency and academic achievement, by presenting an analytical framework that systematically explains the transformation of capital forms from a sociolinguistic perspective.

In practical terms, the linguistic capital conversion model developed in this study offers a new direction for developing Arabic language education in higher education. The study's findings indicate that improved Arabic language proficiency does not automatically lead to social mobility unless it is accompanied by opportunities that enable students to gain academic and social legitimacy (Bhar & Chua, 2025). Therefore, the focus of Arabic language learning needs to shift from merely achieving linguistic competence to creating an academic ecosystem capable of

facilitating the process of capital conversion through practical activities, such as bi'ah lughawiyyah, academic forums, student organizations, academic competitions, internship programs, international collaborations, and Arabic-based professional networks (Alsaied, 2024; Bassiouney & Walters, 2020). From this perspective, the success of Arabic language education is no longer measured solely by students' level of language proficiency, but also by the extent to which the institution is able to translate that proficiency into academic recognition, expanded networks, opportunities for further study, and enhanced competitiveness among graduates (Almashour, 2024). Thus, the model developed in this study not only serves as a conceptual framework for explaining the mechanisms of students' social mobility but can also serve as a foundation for formulating policies on curriculum development, learning, and the academic ecosystem aimed at optimizing the social, academic, and professional value of Arabic linguistic capital.

CONCLUSSION

خاتمة

This study demonstrates that linguistic capital contributes to students' social mobility not as an independent resource, but through its recognition and strategic mobilization within the academic field. The findings indicate that linguistic competence alone does not automatically generate social mobility; rather, its value emerges when it receives institutional legitimation and is strategically deployed under specific academic conditions. Through this process, linguistic capital can be transformed into symbolic, social, and economic capital, thereby contributing to students' mobility. Accordingly, the contribution of linguistic capital to social mobility is shaped by the conditions under which linguistic competence is recognized, valued, and strategically mobilized within the academic field.

As illustrated in Figure 5, the model generated by this study depicts linguistic capital conversion as a contextual pathway through which students' linguistic resources are transformed into broader forms of capital and ultimately associated with social mobility. The model provides an empirically grounded framework for understanding the strategic position of Arabic as a social resource in Islamic higher education and offers a basis for examining capital conversion beyond language proficiency itself. Given the study's cross-sectional design and limited institutional scope, future research should use longitudinal designs to trace capital-conversion trajectories across semesters and structural equation modeling (SEM) with larger, multi-institutional samples to test the proposed model and assess its generalizability.

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