

International Posture Of Malaysian Learners In Arabic Programme

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Abstract

Language learners with a solid international posture are generally more willing to communicate in the foreign language they learn. However, studies on global posture could have been conducted better, especially for Arabic language learners. Therefore, this study aims to examine the level of readiness of students of Arabic studies programs in terms of international posture. This study uses a quantitative design by distributing online questionnaire instruments to 180 final-year students of the bachelor's degree from three public universities in Malaysia, namely Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), and International Islamic University (UIA). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. The results showed that students in tertiary Arabic Studies programs in Malaysia report that international posture is in the moderate range but relatively lower. Students need to capitalize on all these aspects, which will directly and indirectly contribute to better achievement in learning Arabic.

Keywords: International; Motivation; Cultural Motives; Fun; Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Language learners with a solid international posture are generally more willing to interact with communities and resources of the target language. The need to communicate in Arabic across borders has increased, as Arabic is already considered a global language, especially in Muslim countries such as Egypt and Jordan. The increase in the use of the Arabic language is driven by the need for non-native speakers to communicate with native speakers. Recently, various things need to be discussed where Arabic is actively used as a medium of communication between Muslim countries and communities outside their countries. International postures were originally introduced by Yashima (2005). Global posture means the desire to meet and communicate with the international community. The desire to share with outside communities is proven to be a helpful motivation in English language learning, as global posture has been positively linked, directly or indirectly, with some desirable outcomes in language learning motivation, such as willingness to communicate (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Kormos & Csizér, 2008) and language acquisition. Therefore, international posture can be seen as a positive motivational construct beneficial for language learning students. In addition, the aspect of global posture in the study of language learning motivation has been proven to encourage students to learn English as a foreign language.

Several past studies have proven that international posture can increase student involvement in the international community. Among other things, past studies are widely associated with motivational variables (Geoghegan, 2018; Alnajashi, 2020)(Alnajashi, 2020) and cultural motives (Soliman et al., 2016; Dweik & Abu-Irmies, 2015)(Dweik & Abu-Irmies, 2015). However, the focus on the engagement of Arabic

language students towards international posture received less attention from past researchers.

The lack of proficiency in the Arabic language among public university students in Malaysia is a constraint on their involvement in international posture. Most past researchers also paid less attention to student involvement in global posture, especially among students of Arabic studies programs. This is because students are less involved in the international community, which causes them to be less able to strengthen their communication in Arabic. This lack of exposure causes students to feel anxious to communicate in Arabic with international students. Arabic is often considered a challenging communication medium, causing many students to have problems adapting to the environment, especially when interacting with Arab students. The results of the previous study found that the anxiety level to communicate in Arabic among 25 KUIS students has resulted in their poor use of Arabic.

Research on international posture was conducted by Yashima (2002). The study refers to a foreign language learning environment in Japan where English language learners have little contact with native English speakers. The study proved that English language learners in that country have yet to have an apparent, specific reaction to the real English-speaking community. In that study, English language learners in Japan felt that English seemed to represent something related to foreign countries and foreigners. However, some students in that study had a positive attitude toward English in an international posture (Yashima, 2002).

The importance of international posture is proven in the English learning environment in Japan and China. Their study used the motivation of second language learning and the concept of Yashima's international posture to investigate the effects of teaching English as a foreign language in China. A variable was introduced by Yashima (2002) to study the willingness to communicate among Japanese students in the context of learning a foreign language. Yashima (2002) divided the variable into four scales, namely *Intercultural Friendship Orientation*, *Interest in Foreign Affairs*, *Intergroup Approach-Avoidance Tendency*, and *Interest in Vocations or Activities*. All four variables were tested by the multidimensional construct method of international posture. Questionnaires were conducted on Japanese students to gauge their motivation to communicate with English speakers.

However, the study of international posture continued until there was a change in the scale of this measurement. Yashima (2009) released *Intercultural Friendship Orientation* as a variable in addition to the increase in the *Interest in Foreign Affairs* scale. In addition, the new variable has been updated with the addition of the *Having Something to Communicate* scale by Yashima (2009). This change in the scale of variables occurs due to the existence of behavioral biases of knowledge of students learning foreign languages towards the international community (Botes et al., 2020). As a continuation of the measurement of existing variables, students' perception of English as an international language is also highlighted in scale testing through unidimensional construct methods such as "*I want to communicate with communities from other countries*" (Csizér & Kormos, 2009). On the other hand, the study of Ali et al. (2015) chose the international posture and the purpose of learning a foreign language as a measurement scale. That study stated items such as "*I want to learn English to travel to a country instead of English speakers to work*" and "*I want to learn English to interact*

with people in my country." This scale focuses on international sociocultural formation, similar to the scale used by Csizér and Kormos (2009) and *Intercultural Friendship Orientation* (Yashima, 2002). Meanwhile, Weger (2013) said the high motivation to learn different languages is a scale that measures international posture. An item such as "*I want to know more about Americans*" is also included. In general, it is found that previous studies had adapted the scales used by Yashima. Based on the existing measurement scale, researchers added and modified scale measurements from earlier studies according to the appropriateness of their study objectives. Therefore, the research question is as follows: What is the level of readiness of students of Arabic language programs from the aspect of international posture?

METHOD

This study fully uses a quantitative approach. Data collection in this study was conducted using a survey where questionnaires were distributed to respondents online. The respondents of this study consist of 180 final-year students with bachelor's degrees in Arabic Language from three universities, namely Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and International Islamic University (UIA). The sampling technique used is simple sampling, as it considers the suitability of selecting students to answer the questionnaire. This selection is also based on their maturity and experience in learning Arabic at the university level. The students have studied Arabic at the university for at least three years plus 11 years of school experience. Therefore, maturity and experience make their answers more consistent than pre-university students.

Questionnaire instruments were adapted and modified based on a review of the literature conducted by past researchers on aspects of international posture (Bakar, 2021; Yashima, 2009). As for instrument measurements, a 4-point Likert consent scale was used, i.e., 1 'strongly disagree,' 2 'disagree,' 3 = 'agree,' and 4 = 'strongly agree.' Midpoints are not involved in this instrument as it considers the biased response (Tsang, 2012). This study uses Cronbach's alpha to test and check the validity and reliability of the instrument. The researchers used SPSS version 25 to analyze the percentage and frequency of the respondent's background. Using SPSS version 25 software as well, the construct reliability value reading of each aspect is reported as follows:

Table 1: Instrument Scale Measurement Content

No.	Construct	Reliability Value, α
1	International posture	0.927

Based on the questionnaires distributed to the students, the study was able to collect accurate data and meet the requirements of the study. After that, the data were analyzed and discussed by percentage and frequency. The findings are arranged in order of question numbers. Part A is related to the background of the respondent. The findings of the Part A questionnaire are as per the following table:

Table 2: Part A: Background of Respondents

No.	Characteristics	Frequency	(%)	
1	Gender	Male	87	48.3
		Female	93	51.7
2	University name	UKM	69	38.3
		USIM	73	40.6
		UIA	38	21.1
3	Total Arabic language allocation hours in a week	hour	55	30.6

		1-2 hours	64	35.6
		More than 2 hours	61	33.9
4	Arabic mastery stage	Very weak	12	6.7
		Weak	8	4.4
		Moderate	103	57.2
		Good	42	23.3
		Excellent	15	8.3

Based on the background analysis of the respondents, the number of female students was 93 (51.7%), more than the number of male students, which is only 87 (48.3%). In addition, the survey found that 73 students (40.6%) were respondents from USIM, while 69 students (38.3%) were from UKM, and the remaining 38 students (21.1%) were from UIA. In addition, the study also found that the majority of 64 students (35.6%) allocated 1-2 hours to learn Arabic in a week while 61 students (33.9%) used more than 2 hours for Arabic and only 55 students (30.6%) used 0-1 hours for this subject. In addition, the results of the survey found that the majority of 103 students (57.2%) had a moderate level of Arabic language proficiency while 42 students (23.3%) mastered Arabic well, and 15 students (8.3%) had excellent levels of Arabic language proficiency. However, the study also found that 8 students (4.4%) in the final year were found to be weak in mastering Arabic subjects.

To study the level of readiness of students of Arabic studies programs in terms of international posture. There are 21 items of questions that describe international posture involving 180 students. The findings of the Part B questionnaire are as per following table:

Table 3: Part B: International Posture

Item	Statement	VSD	D	A	VSA	Mean	Standard Deviation
B1	I would like to meet Arab students who are continuing their studies in Malaysia.	1.1% (2)	4.4% (8)	38.9% (70)	55.6% (100)	3.48	.638
B2	I try to avoid talking to Arabs as much as possible.	16.7% (30)	32.2% (58)	21.7% (39)	29.4% (53)	2.63	1.076
B3	I will talk to Arab students even if there is only one student at my place of study.	2.8% (5)	15.6% (28)	40.6% (73)	41.1% (74)	3.20	.800
B4	I don't mind sharing an apartment or a room with Arab students.	4.4% (8)	10.0% (18)	38.3% (69)	47.2% (85)	3.28	.820
B5	I would like to participate in volunteer activities to help students/tourists/Arabs get used to living in the local community.	1.7% (3)	3.3% (6)	47.2% (85)	47.8% (86)	3.41	.641
B6	I would feel comfortable if Arabs moved in next to my house.	2.8% (5)	15.6% (28)	43.3% (78)	38.3% (69)	3.17	.789
B7	I want to work in an organization that uses Arabic.	2.2% (4)	8.9% (16)	46.1% (83)	42.8% (77)	3.29	.722
B8	I want to work in Arab countries.	3.3% (6)	13.3% (24)	36.1% (65)	47.2% (85)	3.27	.817
B9	I want to work in an Arab international organization like the OIC.	1.7% (3)	12.2% (22)	40.6% (73)	45.6% (82)	3.30	.746

B10	I am interested in a career in Arab countries.	1.7% (3)	13.3% (24)	42.8% (77)	42.2% (76)	3.25	.748
B11	I don't think what happens in the Arab world has anything to do with my daily life.	22.8% (41)	25.0% (45)	24.4% (44)	27.8% (50)	2.57	1.123
B12	I tend to avoid jobs that will always send me to Arab countries.	18.3% (33)	23.9% (43)	32.8% (59)	25.0% (45)	2.64	1.049
B13	I always read and watch the news about the Arab world.	8.9% (16)	29.4% (53)	35.6% (64)	26.1% (47)	2.78	.933
B14	I always talk about situations and events happening in the Arab world with family and friends.	10.6% (19)	23.9% (43)	33.3% (60)	32.2% (58)	2.87	.986
B15	I have a very deep interest in Arab and Islamic world affairs.	3.3% (6)	16.7% (30)	40.6% (73)	39.4% (71)	3.16	.819
B16	I am not very interested in the news of Arab countries.	15.6% (28)	28.9% (52)	27.8% (50)	27.8% (50)	2.67	1.044
B17	I have a view that I want to share with other Arab countries.	6.7% (12)	25.6% (46)	31.7% (57)	36.1% (65)	2.97	.942
B18	I have an issue that I want to highlight to the community in the Arab world.	3.9% (7)	28.3% (51)	32.8% (59)	35.0% (63)	2.98	.890
B19	I have ideas about issues in Arab countries such as the Palestine-Israel issue.	1.7% (3)	15.6% (28)	43.9% (79)	38.9% (70)	3.20	.757
B20	I have ideas about issues in Arab countries such as the Syrian issue.	2.2% (4)	16.7% (30)	44.4% (80)	36.7% (66)	3.15	.775
B21	I do not have any views on issues in Arab countries.	17.2% (31)	27.2% (49)	27.8% (50)	27.8% (50)	2.66	1.063

Source: Bakar, 2021; adapted from Yashima, 2009

Based on item B1, the results showed that 100 students (55.6%) strongly agreed to meet Arab students continuing their studies in Malaysia. In addition, only 70 students (38.9%) agree with this statement. The rest of the eight students (4.4%) disagreed, and two (1.1%) responded strongly disagree with this statement. Based on item B2, the study found that 58 students (32.2%) opposed avoiding talking to Arabs as much as possible. In addition, 53 students (29.4%) strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 39 students (21.7%) blend and only 30 (16.7%) strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B3, the study found that the majority of 74 students (41.1%) very strongly agree to talk to Arab students even if there is only one student at my place of study. In addition, 73 students (40.6%) agree, and 28 (15.6%) disagree. The remaining five students (2.8%) strongly disagree with this statement. Based on item B4, the study found that most 85 students (47.2%) very strongly agree that they don't mind sharing an apartment or a room with Arab students. In addition, 69 students (38.3%) agreed, and 18 (10.0%) answered disagreed. The rest of the students (4.4%) strongly disagree with the statement. Based on item B5, the study found that the majority of 86 students (47.8%) very strongly agree to participate in volunteer activities to help students, tourists, and Arabs get used to living in the local community. In addition, 85 students (47.2%) agreed. Only six (3.3%) disagree, and 3 (1.7%) strongly disagree with this statement. Based on item B6, the study found that a majority of 78 students (43.3%) agree that they would feel

comfortable if Arabs moved in next to my house. In addition, 69 students (38.3%) very strongly agree, 28 students (15.6%) disagree, and five students (2.8%) very strongly disagree with this statement. Based on item B7, the study found that the majority of 83 students (46.1%) agree that they want to work in an organization that uses Arabic. In addition, 77 students (42.8%) strongly agreed with this statement. The remaining 16 students (8.9%) disagree, and four (2.2%) strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B8, the study found that most 85 students (47.2%) strongly agree that they want to work in Arab countries. In addition, 65 students (36.1%) agree with this statement, 24 students (13.3%) disagree, and six students (3.3%) very strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B9, the study found that most 82 students (45.6%) strongly agree that they want to work in an Arab international organization like the OIC. In addition, 73 students (40.6%) agree with this statement. The remaining 22 students (12.2%) disagree, and only three (1.7%) strongly disagree with this statement. Based on item B10, the study found that a majority of 77 students (42.8%) agree that they are interested in a career in Arab countries. In addition, 76 students (42.2%) strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 24 students (13.3%) disagree, and only three (1.7%) strongly disagree with the idea.

Based on item B11, the study found that most 50 students (27.8%) strongly agree that they don't think what happens in the Arab world has anything to do with their daily lives. In addition, 44 students (24.4%) agree with this statement. The remaining 45 (25.0%) disagree, and 41 (22.8%) strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B12, the study found that 59 students (32.8%) very strongly agree that they tend to avoid jobs that will always send them to Arab countries. In addition, 45 students (25.0%) strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 43 (23.9%) disagree, and 33 (18.3%) strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B13, the study found that most 64 students (35.6%) agree that they always read and watch the news about the Arab world. In addition, only 47 students (26.1%) strongly agree with the statement. However, the number of respondents who disagree with this statement is 53 (29.4%), and the remaining 16 students (8.9%) very strongly disagree with this statement. Based on item B14, the study found that most 60 students (33.3%) agree they always talk about situations and events in the Arab world with family and friends. In addition, 58 students (32.2%) very strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 43 students (23.9%) disagreed and 19 (10.6%) strongly disagreed with this statement. Based on item B15, the study found that a majority of 73 students (40.6%) agree that they are intensely interested in Arab and Islamic world affairs. In addition, 71 students (39.4%) strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 30 (16.7%) disagree, and 6 (3.3%) strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B16, the study found that the majority of 50 students (27.8%) very strongly agree that they are not very interested in the news of Arab countries. In addition, 52 students (28.9%) disagree, and the remaining 28 (15.6%) strongly disagree with the statement. Based on item B17, the study found that the majority of 65 students (36.1%) very strongly agree that they have views that they want to share with other Arab countries. In addition, 57 students (31.7%) agree with this statement. The rest of the 46 students (25.6%) disagree, and only 12 (6.7%) very strongly disagree with the statement. Based on item B18, the study found that the majority of 63 students (35.0%) very strongly agree that they have an issue they want to highlight to the community in the Arab world. In addition, 59 students (32.8%) agree with this statement. The remaining

51 students (28.3%) disagree, and only seven (3.9%) strongly disagree with the information. Based on item B19, the study found that the majority of 79 students (43.9%) agree that they have ideas about the issues of Arab countries, such as the Palestine-Israel issue. In addition, 70 students (38.9%) strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 28 (15.6%) disagree, and 3 (1.7%) strongly disagree with the information. Based on item B20, the study found that the majority of 80 students (44.4%) agree that they have ideas about the issues of Arab countries, such as the Syrian issue. In addition, 66 students (36.7%) strongly agree with this statement. The remaining 30 (16.7%) disagree, and 4 (2.2%) strongly disagree with the idea. Based on item B21, the study found that the majority of 50 students (27.8%) agree that they do not have any views on the issue of Arab countries. In addition, 49 students (27.2%) disagree, and the remaining only 31 students (17.2%) very strongly disagree with the statement.

International Posture among Students in Arabic Studies Programme

The study found that most students have a high level of readiness towards the international posture aspect, i.e., the overall item is 0.943, which achieves a good and satisfactory level. The findings showed that most students are interested in a career in an Arab country. This statement is also supported by Ahmed's study (2015) that most students have ambitions to work in Arab countries. To engage with the international community, students must communicate in foreign languages. Students can create careers with the international community by learning a foreign language. This is supported by Brosh's study (2013) that learning a foreign language is an essential thing, as the United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, said, "*the country needs to create a future where all Americans need to realize that with communication more than one language. It can make the country more competitive with other countries*".

In addition, the findings showed that students often read and watch news about the Arab world. This is because students have an interest in learning Arabic and motivational support that influences students to learn Arabic. This interest is significant as it can shape changes in attitudes, the formation of perceptions, and the appreciation of learning. However, the study by Nur Afifah Fadzil et al. (2021) argued that although students show no interest in reading, they still watch Arabic news and access Arabic information over the internet. Three main factors cause students to be less interested in teaching and learning Arabic: parental influence, teacher influence, and educational curriculum (Zaiton Mustafa & Hishamuddin Salim, 2012).

Furthermore, studies have found that students have an intense interest in the affairs of the Arab and Islamic world. This is because the Arabic language has been widely used worldwide. The current needs, especially in the economic, tourism, and sociopolitical sectors, have been the catalyst for learning Arabic, especially in communication. This finding is supported by Aladdin (2013), proving that Arabic is one of the world's most important and influential languages. Arabic language learning continues to receive a positive response, especially from Muslims. This shows that the current knowledge of the Arab world cannot be separated from the Malay community and, especially, Muslims.

In addition, students of Arab studies programs have views that they want to share with the community in other Arab countries. This is because language differences make sharing ideas and opinions with outside communities difficult. Apart from placing

reliance on translation, students feel that mastering the target language itself (Arabic) is the best way for a student to master it. This finding is supported by Köksal and Tercan's (2019) study that students respond positively and do not avoid communicating with strangers. With this, students of the Arabic study program can prioritize mastering the foreign language to communicate directly with outsiders. Thus, the objectives for the exchange of views between them can be realized.

In addition, students agree that they want to work in international organizations that use Arabic, such as OIC. This is because the majority of OIC members themselves are among Arab Muslims. It requires good communication skills to interact with each other. This statement is supported by the findings of Brosh (2013) that students who wish to work in a government agency must have Arabic language skills, one of the world's focus languages. As a result of this Arab studies program, students can expand their communication network with Arabs, especially in the employment sector.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study found that the international posture of Arabic students in Malaysia is in the moderate range but relatively lower. Most of the students only use Arabic during their classroom learning. Accordingly, if students are required to learn Arabic in a foreign language environment and their classroom learning time is limited, they must capitalize on language learning resources, activities, and media. This is because if students take advantage of all the facilities and opportunities available around them, it will indirectly help them learn Arabic and motivate them to learn the language. Thus, students can maximize their involvement in and out of the classroom, indirectly contributing to good achievement in learning Arabic skills. Therefore, students should take advantage of their opportunities by maximizing their involvement in and out of the classroom and engaging with the international community. This study will likely provide benefits to the teaching and learning of the Arabic language in our country. As a recommendation for future studies, this study hopes that research on international posture involves cultural motives, motivational level, engagement, enjoyment, and other possibly related constructs.

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