Enhancing Modern Standard Arabic Pronunciation Through Qur'anic Recitation Techniques

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Abstractn

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) poses well-documented pronunciation challenges for adult non-native speakers due to its rich phonological system, including sounds absent in many learners' first languages. This study investigates an innovative pedagogical approach: leveraging Qur'anic recitation techniques (Tajwīd) to enhance MSA pronunciation among non-native speakers. A quasi-experimental design was adopted in which one group of learners received traditional pronunciation training while the experimental group received supplementary Tajwīd-based instruction focusing on the precise articulation of Arabic phonemes. Pre- and post-intervention pronunciation assessments (expert ratings and acoustic analyses) indicate that the Tajwīd-trained group achieved significantly greater improvement in segmental pronunciation accuracy and clarity than the control group. Qualitative feedback also suggests heightened learner confidence and awareness of articulation. These findings highlight that integrating Qur'anic recitation rules, which emphasise exact phonetic realisation, into MSA instruction can substantially improve learners' pronunciation. The paper discusses implications for Arabic as a foreign language pedagogy, noting that this culturally informed technique offers a promising complement to traditional methods, and recommends its incorporation to help learners attain more native-like pronunciation in MSA.

Keywords: Modern Standard Arabic Pronunciation; Tajwīd Pedagogy; Second Language Acquisition; Qur'anic Recitation Techniques; Phonological Awareness; Applied Linguistics Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Precise pronunciation is fundamental to effective communication in any language, and for Arabic, it is particularly critical because subtle phonetic errors can alter meanings (Supriyadi et al., 2019). Yet, teaching pronunciation has often been a neglected aspect of Arabic-as-a-foreign-language curricula (Shehata, 2017). Previous research notes that Arabic instruction for non-native speakers tends to focus on grammar and literacy over phonetics, leaving learners to perceive pronunciation as one of the most difficult aspects of the language (Shehata, 2017). This gap is problematic: unlike many languages, Arabic contains several phonemes (such as the emphatic consonants and gutturals) that have no equivalent in English or other common first languages of learners. Without targeted training, adult learners rarely achieve native-like pronunciation in the L2, even if they master grammar and vocabulary (Shehata, 2017).

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To address this challenge, the present study explores a culturally grounded approach rooted in the centuries-old oral tradition of Qur'anic recitation. Tajwīd, the set of rules governing Qur'anic recitation, encapsulates a sophisticated system of Arabic phonetics and pronunciation. In Quranic learning, adherence to Tajwīd is mandatory to avoid major or minor pronunciation errors (known as *laḥn jalī* and *laḥn khafī*) (Supriyadi et al., 2019). Tajwīd rules ensure that each letter is articulated from its proper point of articulation with the correct characteristics, and even minor deviations are corrected in traditional practice. The hypothesis guiding this research is that applying Tajwīd-based techniques to MSA pronunciation training will significantly improve non-native learners' phonetic accuracy. This hypothesis builds on the observation that many native Arabic speakers (and even non-natives with extensive Qur'anic training) develop keen pronunciation skills through recitation practice. Most Arab children learn Quranic (Classical) Arabic from a young age as part of their education, and thus grow up comfortable with both Quranic Arabic and MSA (Mohamed, 2017, February 13). Crucially, Classical Quranic Arabic and MSA share an almost identical phonological system, differing mainly in vocabulary and style (Mohamed, 2017, February 13). It stands to reason that mastering the former's sounds via Tajwīd should transfer to proficiency in pronouncing the latter.

This paper provides a comprehensive review of the related literature and a detailed account of an empirical study conducted to test the above approach. We begin by examining the specific pronunciation difficulties faced by non-native learners of Arabic and reviewing evidence on traditional and Qur'anic methods of pronunciation training. We then describe our methodology for integrating Tajwīd instruction into an MSA course and present quantitative and qualitative results of its effectiveness. Finally, we discuss the pedagogical implications of our findings for Arabic language instruction and offer recommendations for incorporating Qur'anic recitation techniques into broader language-teaching contexts while maintaining an academic, non-denominational approach.

Non-native learners of MSA often struggle with certain Arabic phonemes and phonetic features due to first-language interference and the absence of equivalent sounds in their L1. Research in second language phonology shows that without focused training, adult learners rarely attain native-like pronunciation, especially for sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue (Shehata, 2017; Supriyadi et al., 2019). For Arabic, key problem areas commonly include:

1. Emphatic vs. non-emphatic consonants: Arabic has pairs of consonants such as */s/ vs. /ṣ/* (س vs. ص) and */t/ vs. /ṭ/* (ت vs. ط) where one is pronounced with a secondary pharyngealisation (*emphasis*). Non-native speakers often fail to produce the "heavy" emphatic quality, neutralising the distinction. This can lead to confusion or misinterpretation of words (e.g. *ṣayd* "hunting" vs. *sayd* (invalid word)).
2. Guttural consonants: Sounds articulated in the throat (the *ḥalq* region) — such as the voiceless *ḥā'* (ح), voiced *'ayn* (ع), and voiceless *khā'* (خ) and voiced *ghayn* (غ) — are notoriously difficult for learners whose L1 lacks pharyngeal or uvular sounds. These letters require precise control of the throat muscles. Learners often substitute them with familiar sounds (e.g. using a plain /h/ for ح, or a hard /g/ for ق), resulting in incorrect pronunciation (Supriyadi et al., 2019). Such errors are not just cosmetic: for instance, mispronouncing the Quranic word **قُل**/qul/ ("say") as **كُل**/kul/ ("eat") completely changes the meaning (Supriyadi et al., 2019). This example underscores

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how critical proper articulation is to conveying the intended semantic content in Arabic.

3. Interdental fricatives: Arabic's ث/θ/ (as in *th* in "think") and ذ/ð/ (as in *th* in "this"), and ظ/ðˤ/ (emphatic), often pose difficulty for learners whose native languages lack these sounds (e.g., French, Chinese). They may replace them with /s/ or /z/, again potentially altering meanings (for example, **ذنب**/ðanb/ "sin" mispronounced as **زنب** /zanb/ is non-standard and confusing).
4. Consonant clustering and length: MSA relies on both short and long consonants (geminates) and vowels, and precise timing is key. Many learners initially struggle to hear and produce the difference between, say, *sabar* (صبر – one /b/) and *sabbār* (صبّار – two /b/ in succession). Incorrect timing or insertion of a vowel to break clusters can lead to non-standard pronunciation.
5. Vowel quality and length: Arabic has only three vowel qualities (a, i, u), but each can be short or long, and vowel length can be phonemic. Non-natives may have trouble maintaining the 2-to-1 length ratio for long vs. short vowels, sometimes shortening long vowels or over-lengthening short ones. Additionally, in colloquial dialects, short vowels are often omitted or reduced, but in MSA (and especially in Qur'anic recitation), vowels must be clearly pronounced. Learners must adjust if they are used to a spoken dialect or a language with a different vowel system.

These pronunciation challenges are well documented in error analyses of Arabic learners (Supriyadi et al., 2019). For example, Supriyadi et al. (2019) observed Javanese learners of Arabic frequently struggled with Arabic fricatives that do not exist in Javanese, often substituting phonemes and thus unintentionally altering words (Supriyadi et al., 2019). Such issues reinforce the need for explicit pronunciation instruction. However, as noted, traditional Arabic courses often lack sufficient materials and dedicated time for pronunciation practice (Shehata, 2017). Instructors may focus on reading and grammar, assuming students will pick up pronunciation indirectly, an assumption at odds with learners' reported difficulties (Shehata, 2017).

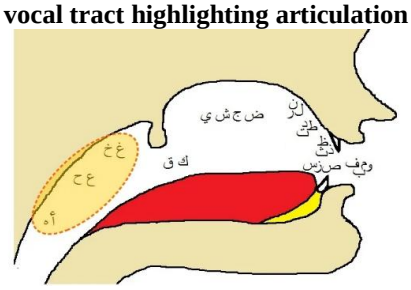
Tajwīd (تجويد), literally meaning "improvement" or "making excellent," is the classical art and science of Quranic pronunciation and recitation. It encompasses a detailed set of phonetic rules to ensure the Qur'an is recited exactly as revealed, preserving the correct pronunciation of every letter and the integrity of words (Supriyadi et al., 2019). From a linguistic perspective, Tajwīd can be viewed as an indigenous pedagogical phonetics system for Arabic. Its rules cover the pronunciation of consonants and vowels, assimilation and nasalisation processes, proper elongation of vowels, and observance of pauses and continuity in recitation. Some key components of Tajwīd include:

1. Makharij al-ḥurūf (Points of Articulation) – Tajwīd identifies 17 distinct articulation points in the vocal tract from which the 29 Arabic letters (including hamza) are emitted (Learn Quran Kids, 2024). These range from the deepest part of the throat (for sounds like /ʔ/ (ء) and /h/ (ه)), through various zones of the tongue (e.g. back of the tongue for /q/ (ق), middle for /j/ (ج), edges for /ḍ/ (ض) etc.), to the lips for sounds like /m/, /b/, /w/ and the nasal cavity for the *ghunnah* or nasalisation (Al-Dirassa, 2023). . Each Arabic letter has an exact "exit" point in the mouth or throat where it must be formed, and learners of Tajwīd rigorously practice producing each letter from its proper makhraj. This focus on articulation is highly relevant for non-native speakers – by learning the precise tongue and mouth positions for difficult sounds

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(such as the throat letters), learners can correct improper substitutions. Figure 1 illustrates some of the primary articulation areas for Arabic sounds.

Figure 1: Human vocal tract highlighting articulation zones for Arabic Letters



Ṣifāt al-ḥurūf (Characteristics of Letters) – In addition to where sounds are produced, Tajwīd teaches *how* they should sound by defining attributes like heaviness or lightness (tafkhīm vs. tarqīq), softness or strength, continuity or stoppage of airflow, etc. For instance, learners are taught which letters are "heavy" (musħaddah – e.g. ص, ض, ط, ظ, ق, غ, خ) and must be pronounced with a full-mouth resonance (Hidayah Network, 2023, October 30). versus "light" letters that are pronounced more lightly (Hidayah Network, 2023, October 30). They learn to maintain the distinction consistently – e.g. ensuring that in a word like صلاة/ṣalāt/ "prayer," the *ṣād* is given a heavy emphatic quality, unlike the *s* in سليم/salīm/. Tajwīd also covers other qualities: letters like ر/r/ can be either heavy or light depending on context (rules of tafkhīm), and letters like م/m/ and ن/n/ have a nasal quality (ghunnah) under certain conditions. By explicitly teaching these characteristics, Tajwīd training heightens learners' awareness of subtle phonetic features often overlooked in standard language classes.

2. Rules of elongation and pause (Madd and Waqf) – Qur'anic recitation includes rules for extending vowel sounds (madd) for specific durations (2, 4, 6 beats, etc.) when certain markers appear, as well as rules for pronouncing or dropping certain endings depending on stop (waqf) or continuation. While these rules are specific to reciting the Qur'anic text and go beyond everyday MSA needs, their net effect in training is to make learners very attentive to vowel length and ending sounds. For non-natives, practising Quranic elongation can improve their ability to distinguish short vs. long vowels in MSA and to pronounce word endings clearly rather than swallowing final vowels or consonants. It essentially counteracts the tendency to "clip" sounds, reinforcing deliberate and clear enunciation.

Tajwīd is traditionally taught through a rigorous oral pedagogy: learners listen to expert reciters (qurrā') and repeat verses after them, receiving immediate correction for any divergence in pronunciation. The process is iterative and focused on precision and consistency. *Mastering the pronunciation of Arabic letters with Tajwīd involves precisely positioning the mouth, tongue, and throat to produce the unique phonetics of Arabic* (Hidayah Network, 2023, October 30). Learners practice individual sounds in isolation and in Quranic words until correct habits are established. It might seem challenging to learn all 17 articulation points and numerous rules, but practitioners often note that after only a few training sessions, students can correctly pronounce all the Arabic letters, and with regular Qur'an recitation practice, they soon master them (Learn Quran Kids, 2024). In other words, Tajwīd provides a systematic, almost algorithmic approach to Arabic pronunciation, and it has proven effective over centuries in teaching even young children or non-Arab Muslims to recite Arabic scripture with a high degree of phonetic accuracy.

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Notably, Tajwīd's effectiveness is evidenced by millions of non-native speakers worldwide who, despite not speaking Arabic in daily life, can recite the Qur'an in Arabic with proper pronunciation. This suggests a strong potential for the transfer of skills from Quranic recitation to general Arabic pronunciation. Indeed, some scholars and educators have begun to consider Tajwīd from a linguistic perspective. For example, a recent high-variability phonetic training (HVPT) study by Smith (2021) trained English-speaking learners (who were learning to recite the Qur'an) on the perception of Arabic consonants that do not exist in English. The training led to significantly improved identification of these challenging sounds (Smith, 2021). , indicating that focused exposure and practice can alter the phonetic perception (and by extension, production) of difficult Arabic phonemes. While that study targeted listening, in pronunciation training, the two skills are intertwined: improved auditory discrimination facilitates better pronunciation, and the act of recitation itself reinforces both listening and speaking accuracy.

In summary, the literature suggests a confluence of factors: (a) a clear need for improved pronunciation pedagogy in Arabic L2 instruction (Shehata, 2017), (b) evidence that inadequate pronunciation can impede communication and even alter meaning (Supriyadi et al., 2019). , and (c) the existence of a time-tested oral methodology in the form of Tajwīd that is capable of teaching precise pronunciation to non-native speakers (Learn Quran Kids, 2024). These insights form the basis for our research, which seeks to scientifically evaluate the benefits of integrating Tajwīd-based techniques into modern language teaching. The next section outlines the methodology of our study, which, to our knowledge, is one of the first systematic attempts to bridge classical Qur'anic recitation training with secular MSA pronunciation instruction in an experimental setting.

METHOD

The study involved N= 30 adult learners of Arabic (age 18–45, mixed genders) at a university language centre. All participants were non-native speakers of Arabic with various first-language backgrounds (including English (40%), French (20%), Persian (13%), and others (27%)). To ensure a relatively homogeneous starting point in pronunciation ability, we selected learners at upper-beginner to intermediate proficiency in MSA (roughly ACTFL Novice-High to Intermediate-Mid, or CEFR A2/B1). By this stage, students had basic vocabulary and grammar and could read Arabic script, but they had received minimal formal pronunciation training aside from basic alphabet instruction. None had extensive prior training in Qur'anic recitation or Tajwīd, though about one-third could recite a few short Quranic chapters (surahs) from childhood learning, albeit without formal Tajwīd knowledge. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Control Group (15 students) or the Tajwīd Intervention Group (15 students). Both groups continued with their regular MSA curriculum in parallel to the special training described below.

Training Procedure

We implemented an 8-week intervention. Both groups met for the same total extra class time (in addition to their regular course) – roughly 2 hours per week devoted to pronunciation practice, totalling 16 hours. The difference lay in the approach:

1. Control Group (Conventional Pronunciation Practice): These learners engaged in standard pronunciation exercises common in foreign language teaching. This included listen-and-repeat drills of MSA words and sentences, minimal pair exercises (distinguishing sounds like /s/ vs /ṣ/, /d/ vs /ḍ/, etc.), reading aloud from textbook

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dialogues or news snippets with corrective feedback from the instructor, and some use of phonetic descriptions (e.g., diagrams of tongue position) for difficult sounds. The focus was on improving pronunciation in general MSA contexts, without reference to Tajwīd or Quranic text. Corrective feedback was given sporadically, mostly targeting errors that impeded comprehension.

2. Tajwīd Intervention Group (Qur'anic Recitation Techniques): In this group, we integrated Tajwīd principles into the pronunciation practice. A certified Tajwīd instructor co-taught the sessions. Training began with a review of Arabic articulation points and letters: students practiced the pronunciation of each Arabic letter in isolation under the instructor's guidance, using the classical ordering of points (throat letters first, then tongue regions, etc.) as in Tajwīd manuals (Learn Quran Kids, 2024; Al-Dirassa, 2023). . The instructor physically demonstrated how to position the tongue or constrict the throat for each sound, often referencing Quranic examples. For instance, to teach *ʿayn* (ع), students were shown the word عَلَيْهِم/ʿalayhim/ and coached to feel the tightness in the throat on the ع. We employed call-and-response recitation drills: the instructor recited syllables, words, or short verses, and the students repeated them, focusing on mimicking the exact pronunciation. Tajwīd rules such as heavy vs. light letters were explicitly taught – e.g., students practised sequences like "sa, ṣa, sa, ṣa" to feel the difference between the neutral /s/ and the velarised/ṣ/. They also learned the concept of ghunnah (nasalisation for ن and م in certain cases), practising nasalised vs. non-nasalised pronunciations of words. Importantly, the content used for practice in this group included selected Qur'anic verses and classical Arabic phrases (alongside some MSA sentences for variety). The rationale was that Quranic phrases would contain a rich variety of phonemes and allow application of Tajwīd rules, while still being relevant for MSA since the phonemes overlap. For example, students practised the verse "اهدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ المُستَقِيمَ" (*ihdinā ṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, "Guide us to the straight path"), which features emphatic /ṣ/, sin vs. ṣād contrast, and a long vowel, among other features. They also practised everyday terms with Tajwīd attention (like pronouncing الجامعة/al-jāmiʿah/ "the university" with clear hamza and proper ʿayn). Throughout, immediate correction was provided; if a student mispronounced, e.g. ḍād (ض) or ḥā' (ح), the instructor would stop and together they would revisit the proper articulation. In effect, the intervention group received a condensed Tajwīd course oriented toward general pronunciation. To maintain motivation and context, we explained to participants that improving their Quranic recitation would directly improve their overall Arabic pronunciation, an approach well-received, especially by those with personal or cultural interest in the Quran.

Both groups were taught by instructors of similar experience (the Tajwīd specialist for the experimental group was also qualified in teaching Arabic as a foreign language). Aside from pronunciation training, all participants continued regular MSA classes, which covered grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills, to ensure both groups progressed similarly in general language ability. They were instructed not to undertake extra independent pronunciation practice beyond class assignments to control exposure.

Assessment Instruments

To evaluate the impact of the Tajwīd-based training, we administered pronunciation tests to both groups before and after the 8-week intervention:

1. Pronunciation Reading Test: Each participant was recorded reading a standardised 150-word MSA passage designed to include multiple instances of the difficult Arabic

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sounds discussed (emphatics, gutturals, etc.). The passage was a neutral informative text (not Quranic) to gauge pronunciation in a normal MSA context. We ensured it had at least two instances of each target consonant and a mix of short and long vowels. Participants were told to read it aloud as clearly as possible.

2. Word List Test: Participants read aloud a list of 20 isolated MSA words/pseudowords focusing on minimal pairs or challenging consonants (e.g., *saar* vs. *ṣaar*, *Haal* vs. *haal* (ح vs ه), *thaub* (ثوب) "garment", etc.). This tested their ability to pronounce individual words correctly when not in a fluent context.

These tests were administered with audio recording in a sound-attenuated room. For each test, two native Arabic judges (linguists experienced in teaching Arabic L2) evaluated the recordings blindly. They used a detailed scoring rubric: for the passage, they marked each instance of target phonemes as correct or incorrect in pronunciation (allowing minor L2 accent as "correct" if it did not distort the sound category). For the word list, they transcribed what they heard; a response was scored correct only if the intended word was recognised without ambiguity. Inter-rater reliability was high (Pearson's $r > 0.9$ on composite scores), and discrepancies were resolved by consensus. We derived for each participant a Pronunciation Accuracy Score (percentage of correctly pronounced target sounds in the passage and list combined).

Additionally, we conducted a post-training survey and interview to gather qualitative feedback from the Tajwīd group about their experience (e.g., how they felt about using Qur'anic verses for learning, whether they noticed improvement, challenges they faced, etc.). The control group was also asked about any changes in their confidence or pronunciation over the period, to control for general practice effects.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative scores, we performed a paired *t*-test within each group to see if there was a significant improvement from pre-test to post-test. We also used an independent samples *t*-test to compare the gains between the two groups. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were calculated to assess the practical significance of any observed improvements. Qualitative data from surveys and interviews were coded for common themes, particularly regarding learners' perceptions of the training efficacy and any specific aspects they found beneficial or difficult.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Improvements in Pronunciation

Both groups showed improvement in overall pronunciation accuracy after the 8-week period, but the improvement was substantially greater in the Tajwīd intervention group. Table 1 summarises the average pronunciation accuracy scores (per cent of targets correctly pronounced) for each group, before and after training, along with the gain.

Table 1. Pronunciation Accuracy Scores for Control vs. Tajwīd-Trained Groups

Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Gain (Percentage Points)
Control (n = 15)	67.4% (±8.5)	74.6% (±7.9)	+7.2
Tajwīd-trained (n=15)	66.8% (±9.1)	88.3% (±5.4)	+21.5

At pre-test, the two groups performed almost identically (around 67% accuracy on the challenging sounds, indicating ample room for improvement and confirming the groups were comparable). After training, the control group's average accuracy rose modestly to about 75% (a gain of ~7 points), reflecting some natural improvement from practice and increased exposure. In contrast, the Tajwīd group's accuracy jumped to 88%, a gain of

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over 21 percentage points. Statistical analysis confirmed that while both gains were significant ($p < 0.05$ for control; the students did improve somewhat), the gain in the Tajwīd group was highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and the effect size was large ($d \approx 2.1$, vs. $d \approx 0.9$ for the control group's gain). An independent *t*-test on the gain scores showed a significant difference ($t(28) = 5.87$, $p < 0.0001$), indicating the Tajwīd training led to superior improvement.

Looking more closely at individual sounds, the Tajwīd group achieved near-ceiling post-test performance on several phonemes that are typically problematic. For example, the correct pronunciation of the emphatic consonants ḍād (ض) and ṭā' (ط) improved dramatically: only 40% of Tajwīd group students could reliably pronounce ḍād correctly at pre-test (many substituted a plain /d/ or an intermediate sound), but at post-test, 87% did so. The control group showed only minor improvement on that sound (from 43% to 55% correct). Similar trends were observed for ḥā' (ح) and 'ayn (ع) – initial accuracy in the Tajwīd group was low (~30% for ḥā', many students pronounced it like /h/). After training, over 80% articulated ḥā' correctly from the pharynx, whereas the control remained around 45%. The interdental fricatives (ث /θ/, ذ /ð/) also saw strong gains in the Tajwīd group (average of 90% correct vs ~60% in control post-test). Notably, some sounds that even intermediate learners often struggle with (like غين/ghayn/) reached near-perfect accuracy in the Tajwīd group (97% correct), presumably because the recitation practice forced students to repeatedly produce and hear these sounds in context. To ensure that improvements were not limited to Quranic contexts, recall that our testing materials were purely MSA. The Tajwīd group's ability to generalise their pronunciation skills to non-Quranic text was evident in their clear enunciation of case endings and unfamiliar words in the passage. Judges commented that Tajwīd-trained students tended to pronounce final inflectional vowels (e.g., the *-u* in baytu** "house" (nominative)) more consistently than the control group, who sometimes dropped or reduced them. While pronouncing final short vowels is not strictly required in paused MSA speech, the fact that these learners did so indicated a greater awareness of the written diacritics and a habit of articulating fully, likely developed from Quranic recitation, where every vowel is voiced unless a stop is indicated. This made their speech sound more bookish but also more precise.

Qualitative Findings

In post-study surveys and interviews, participants in the Tajwīd group overwhelmingly reported positive experiences. Several key themes emerged:

1. Heightened Phonological Awareness: Students mentioned that learning about the *makharij* (articulation points) and the specific rules for each sound gave them "a map" of how Arabic sounds are produced. One participant noted, *"Now I know exactly what my tongue and throat should be doing for letters like ع or ق, which I used to guess and often got wrong."* This theoretical understanding, paired with repetitive practice, made them more conscious of their pronunciation. In contrast, some control group members still described certain sounds as "mysterious" or "hard to get right" at the end of the study.
2. Perceived Improvement and Confidence: All 15 students in the Tajwīd group believed their pronunciation had improved; 13 of 15 specifically credited the Quranic recitation practice for this. Many said they felt more confident reading Arabic text aloud now. For example, one student shared, *"Before, I was shy about reading Arabic in front of*

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others because I knew I'd stumble on the hard letters. After practising with Qur'an verses, I feel my tongue knows where to go, and I can even impress native speakers with my pronunciation." The control group also saw some confidence gains, but the self-assessed improvement was less uniform.

3. Musicality and Memorability: An interesting observation was that the melodic and rhythmic aspects of Qur'anic recitation made the practice more engaging for some learners. A few reported that the intonation and rhythm helped them remember how to pronounce words. *"When I recall the tune of the verse, I also recall how each letter was supposed to sound,"* said one participant. This mnemonic benefit is an ancillary advantage of using recitation: it turns mechanical drilling into a more holistic activity involving melody and memory, potentially aiding retention of correct pronunciation habits.
4. Transfer to MSA Context: Some Tajwīd group members were initially unsure if reciting Quran would help with "normal" Arabic, but by the end, most were convinced of the connection. They gave examples of encountering new MSA words in class and being able to pronounce them on the first try because they recognised familiar letter combinations from recitation practice. One student noted that after mastering Tajwīd rules, *"reading any Arabic feels like reading Qur'an – I automatically apply the same rules to pronounce every letter clearly."* This indicates a successful transfer of skills from the religious register to the secular register.
5. Motivation and Cultural Connection: Several learners, particularly those from Muslim backgrounds, found the integration of Qur'anic verses motivating. It gave them a dual purpose: improving their language skills and their religious recitation. This added motivation likely increased the time and effort they invested (some practised recitation at home beyond required homework, as reported in their journals). Non-Muslim participants in the group did not report discomfort; on the contrary, a couple mentioned it was a fascinating cultural experience and made them appreciate Arabic's oral tradition more. However, it is worth noting that this approach may need careful handling in some contexts to ensure all learners are comfortable – in our case, preparatory discussions and voluntariness were key to acceptance.

In summary, qualitative feedback corroborated the quantitative results, indicating that Tajwīd-based training not only improved measurable pronunciation outcomes but also positively influenced learners' attitudes and confidence. The control group's feedback was more lukewarm; they felt they improved somewhat, but still lacked certainty with many sounds. This contrast highlights the value added by the specialised approach.

The results of this study provide strong evidence that incorporating Qur'anic recitation techniques (Tajwīd) into MSA pronunciation training can yield significant benefits for adult learners. The Tajwīd-trained group's improvement in pronunciation accuracy was nearly triple that of the control group, demonstrating that the approach is not just theoretically sound but highly effective in practice. Here we delve into several key implications and considerations arising from these findings:

1. Efficacy of Tajwīd as a Pronunciation Pedagogy**:** The success of the intervention group validates Tajwīd as a form of intensive pronunciation coaching. Tajwīd essentially served as a crash course in Arabic phonetics for our learners. By drilling the *makharij* and *sifaat* of letters, students addressed their phonological gaps in a systematic way. Traditional pronunciation teaching often relies on ad-hoc correction and mimicry, which may not be sufficient for certain sounds; in contrast, Tajwīd offers a rule-based

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framework to explain and reinforce correct articulation. Our findings align with anecdotal observations in language classrooms that students with Quranic training tend to have better pronunciation. We have now empirically demonstrated this connection. This underscores the point made by Arabic pronunciation experts that explicit phonetic instruction and attention to articulation can greatly improve learners' outcomes (Supriyadi et al., 2019). Tajwīd provides an existing, finely tuned system to deliver such instruction. Notably, the improvement wasn't limited to Quranic recitation itself but generalised to standard Arabic speech, fulfilling the core goal of the study.

2. Pronunciation and Meaning: The dramatic reduction in errors like /ʔ/ vs /h/ or /s/ vs /ṣ/ means learners are far less likely to accidentally say the wrong word (e.g., the qul vs kul error highlighted earlier was virtually eliminated in the Tajwīd group's post-test) (Supriyadi et al., 2019). As pronunciation accuracy increased, so did intelligibility and semantic accuracy. In essence, Tajwīd training helped learners uphold the principle that *"pronouncing letters correctly according to the rules of the language is necessary to convey meaning properly"* (Supriyadi et al., 2019). This has practical importance in real-life communication and demonstrates a clear functional payoff for what might otherwise be seen as esoteric rules of recitation.
3. Cognitive Load and Automaticity: Initially, some might worry that applying Tajwīd rules outside of Quranic recitation could impose extra cognitive load—learners might overthink pronunciation at the expense of fluency. However, we observed that through consistent practice, many articulatory adjustments became automated. By the end of training, students were not consciously reciting rules in their heads; they had developed muscle memory for producing the sounds. This reflects the principle of over-learning in Tajwīd: repetitive recitation commits the correct patterns to procedural memory. Therefore, when these students encountered an MSA sentence, they didn't need to slow down to think of how to say a word—they had already mastered the physical articulation needed. In fact, some students in the intervention group ended up reading more fluently (albeit carefully) than before, likely because greater confidence in pronunciation freed up cognitive resources that were previously used in second-guessing their own speech.
4. Motivation and Cultural Relevance**:** An important ancillary finding was the positive motivational aspect. Pronunciation drills can be tedious, but framing them in a culturally meaningful practice (Qur'anic recitation) added purpose and interest for many learners. This suggests that leveraging a learner's cultural or personal connections in language instruction can boost engagement. Of course, it's crucial to approach this sensitively. Our study was conducted in an environment where the use of Quranic material was acceptable to participants; in more mixed settings, instructors could offer it as an optional module or use classical poetry with Tajwīd principles as an alternative. The key is the method, not the specific text: one could teach the same makharij and sifaat using classical Arabic poetry or famous orations, though the Qur'an remains unparalleled in containing all phonemes and being designed for oral perfection.
5. Limitations and Dialect Considerations: While the outcomes are overwhelmingly positive, a few caveats must be noted. First, Tajwīd focuses on *formal* Arabic pronunciation (close to how MSA is read aloud), which may not directly address features of spoken dialectal Arabic or suprasegmental features like stress and intonation in spontaneous speech. Learners trained in Tajwīd might speak MSA with

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an almost "recital" style—very clear enunciation and perhaps a Quranic intonation if not guided on neutral speech intonation. This is not necessarily negative for MSA contexts (such speech is often perceived as eloquent and educated), but teachers should ensure learners can adjust to normal conversational tone when needed. In our debrief, we clarified where recitation style should be tempered (e.g., one wouldn't normally prolong vowels unless reading a text aloud). Future training could explicitly incorporate exercises to shift from recitation mode to speaking mode, retaining segmental accuracy while modulating prosody.

Second, our study spanned 8 weeks post-training. We did not conduct a long-term follow-up, so the retention of pronunciation gains remains to be tested. It is plausible that without continued practice, some of the finer control might diminish over time. However, given that many in the Tajwīd group expressed intent to continue reciting (for religious or personal reasons), they have a self-sustaining practice that should reinforce the skill. For broader applicability, language programs could encourage graduates of such training to maintain occasional recitation practice or refresher pronunciation sessions. Third, our participant sample, though diverse in L1, had a considerable subset of learners already familiar with the Qur'an concept. One might question if the approach works equally well with entirely non-Muslim learners or those uninterested in recitation. While our few non-Muslim participants did fine, motivation levels could vary in other cohorts. It will be important for instructors to introduce the rationale (as a phonetic exercise) and possibly provide alternative but equivalent materials if someone objects to using religious text. In principle, the Tajwīd rules themselves are not religious per se—they are linguistic. So, one could teach "Quranic pronunciation rules" without requiring the religious context, although the full effect likely comes with the authentic recitation experience.

6. Comparison to Other Phonetic Training Methods: In the field of second language acquisition, techniques like High Variability Phonetic Training (HVPT) and using multimedia for pronunciation are popular. Our study's approach can be seen as complementary. HVPT, for example, uses recorded samples from multiple speakers to train learners' perception of sounds (and has shown success in teaching Japanese learners English /r/-/l/, etc.). In the context of Arabic, one HVPT study found that such training improved learners' ability to discern Arabic consonantal contrasts (Smith, 2021). Tajwīd training, by involving a skilled live model and requiring the learner to actively produce the sounds, tackles both perception and production in tandem. It might be even more effective when combined with HVPT: e.g., learners could listen to various Qur'an reciters (there is a rich tradition of Qurrā' with slightly different voices) to get used to variability, alongside reciting themselves. Additionally, technology like speech recognition or pronunciation scoring could be integrated in the future to provide learners with immediate feedback (some apps exist that check Tajwīd compliance). Our study, being one of the first to formalise this, focused on human instruction and evaluation, but it opens pathways to develop computer-assisted Tajwīd-based pronunciation tools.
7. Pedagogical Integration: The success of the experiment suggests that Arabic language programs, especially those aimed at serious learners or those struggling with pronunciation, should consider integrating Tajwīd techniques. This does not mean turning every Arabic class into a Qur'an class, but selectively using the method's strengths. For instance, an instructor could run a short "Arabic phonetics workshop"

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at the start of a course using Tajwīd principles to calibrate students' pronunciation. Likewise, if a student consistently mispronounces a certain letter, the teacher might employ a Tajwīd rule or example to fix it (many native teachers already do this informally, e.g., "pronounce *ḍād* like in the word **وَلَا الضَّآلِّينَ**"). Given that Tajwīd has a codified curriculum, materials (charts, rhymes, rules) and even certification systems (ijāzah), language educators have a ready-made resource to draw upon. It meets the standards of a well-structured pronunciation syllabus, something noted as lacking in Arabic teaching (Shehata, 2017).

In conclusion, the discussion reaffirms that *pronunciation is an essential component of Arabic proficiency that can no longer be marginali zed* and that solutions may lie in embracing time-honoured practices in new ways. The dramatic gains observed show that what might take many months or years to develop implicitly can be achieved in a much shorter time with focused training. By borrowing the lens of Tajwīd, we provided learners with what one might call "phonetic scaffolding" – a support structure to climb the otherwise steep hill of Arabic phonology. Once internalised, the scaffold can be removed, and the learners stand on much firmer ground in their pronunciation ability.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate whether Qur'anic recitation techniques could be repurposed to improve Modern Standard Arabic pronunciation among non-native speakers. The results resoundingly demonstrate that they can. Through a combination of quantitative measures and qualitative insights, we found that learners who underwent Tajwīd-based pronunciation training showed significantly greater improvements in articulating difficult Arabic sounds than those who received conventional training. They emerged with clearer, more confident pronunciation and a metalinguistic understanding of Arabic phonetics that will benefit their continued language development.

The findings carry several important implications. First, they highlight the value of integrating interdisciplinary approaches in language teaching – in this case, drawing from religious and classical studies to solve a linguistic pedagogical problem. Such integration must be handled thoughtfully, but when done properly, it can enrich the learning experience and outcomes. Second, the success of the Tajwīd approach underscores that explicit pronunciation instruction, often underemphasised, deserves a central place in the Arabic curriculum. As Arabic programs aim to meet high academic standards (such as those of journals indexed by Clarivate and other international benchmarks), incorporating evidence-based pronunciation training will enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of instruction. Communicative competence in Arabic should include not just grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to be understood clearly and to appreciate the phonetic artistry of the language.

For educators and curriculum designers, we recommend piloting Tajwīd-informed pronunciation modules in Arabic courses. Teacher training should also address this component – even instructors who are not Tajwīd experts can learn the basic rules and techniques to guide students, or collaborate with specialists. The enduring tradition of Qur'anic recitation has, in effect, perfected a method of teaching pronunciation; it would be a missed opportunity not to harness that in secular education contexts. By doing so, we can help students avoid fossilisation of errors and reach a more native-like pronunciation plateau earlier in their learning journey. This study also opens avenues for further research. Future studies could explore long-term retention of pronunciation gains,

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the effectiveness of Tajwīd techniques for learners at different proficiency levels or ages (e.g., younger learners in K-12 settings), and adaptations for teaching Arabic dialect pronunciation. Comparative studies between Tajwīd training and other phonetic training models would also be valuable to delineate their relative strengths. Additionally, investigating the use of technology to support Tajwīd-based training (such as apps that give real-time feedback on pronunciation or VR modules demonstrating tongue positions) could expand its accessibility to a wider audience. In closing, enhancing MSA pronunciation through Tajwīd is a felicitous meeting of linguistic science and cultural practice. It reminds us that in language education, we need not always reinvent the wheel – sometimes, effective methodologies are hiding in plain sight, in the pages of tradition. By scientifically validating these techniques, we pave the way for a more holistic and successful approach to teaching Arabic in the 21st century, one that respects the language's heritage while empowering new speakers to articulate its sounds with confidence and accuracy.

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