Unveiling the Teaching and Learning Journey of Mastering Arabic at UniSHAMS: A Literature Review Exploration

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Abstract
The proficiency level of the Arabic language among students is a global issue, particularly involving the Teaching and Learning process (TL) in the field of Islamic Studies at the university level. Furthermore, for internationally recognized Islamic universities like UniSHAMS, this issue becomes increasingly relevant to explore. The Arabic language has played a crucial role as the language of knowledge and serves as the medium of instruction in the academic world of Islamic Studies. Despite students undergoing the Arabic language TL process since early schooling stages, their proficiency level in this language still requires continuous improvement. Some of the constraints encountered during the learning process include students' inability to communicate in Arabic, lack of extensive vocabulary and fear of making errors in speech. All these constraints have evidently posed challenges in the teaching process for UniSHAMS lecturers. Moreover, this situation also affects the achievement of Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) targeted throughout the Diploma in Islamic Studies (DIS) program. Therefore, this study aims to explore literature regarding the proficiency levels of the Arabic language among DIS students at UniSHAMS. This study adopts a qualitative design, utilizing the library research method. Meanwhile, data analysis is conducted using content and content and thematic analysis approaches. The study findings demonstrate that the proficiency level of the Arabic language among DIS students at UniSHAMS, particularly in the aspect of TL, is unsatisfactory. Indeed, there are several problems and challenges that need to be addressed as they hinder the smooth progress of students' TL. This study is hoped to assist UniSHAMS, especially the program provider, in designing effective TL activities aimed at enhancing the proficiency level of the Arabic language among DIS students at UniSHAMS.

Introduction

The field of Islamic Studies in Malaysia has developed rapidly and systematically since independence until today. The development of this field is increasingly prominent through the establishment of several Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) and Private Higher Education Institutions (IPTS), including UniSHAMS, which offers various programs in the field of Islamic Studies ranging from foundation level to doctoral studies. Therefore, it has opened opportunities for any citizen and non-citizen with the qualifications to continue their studies and strive to deeply study Islamic knowledge, besides enhancing the identity of graduate Muslims towards achieving the agenda of society and the nation (Nawi, 2021).

Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (UniSHAMS) is a fully state-owned university of the Kedah Darul Aman State Government and registered with the Ministry of Education Malaysia (DU051(K)). UniSHAMS, formerly known as the Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Religious Institute, was upgraded to University College INSANIAH (KUIN) on 18th May 2006. The Kedah state government has been earnest in establishing an Islamic higher education centre in this state that is suitable for a state with a distinguished history in the development of Islamic scholars in the past. The establishment of the Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Institute is also to restore the true tradition of Islamic studies for the benefit of religion, race and country. His Royal Highness the Sultan of Kedah Darul Aman consented to the Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic University Enactment, which was approved by the State Legislative Assembly on 7th December 1994, under Enactment Number 4 of 1995. With the establishment of the Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Religious Institute, a new history is recorded for the state of Kedah, creating a genuine Islamic higher education centre and university-level status. This is very appropriate for a state that has had many Islamic study centres since ancient times (UniSHAMS Official Portal, 2024).

Generally, the main purpose of establishing the Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Religious Institute is to improve the quality of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language to produce knowledgeable, intellectual and respected generations of scholars and intellectuals who are capable, faithful and responsive to the needs of Islamic affairs from time to time. In the early stages of establishment, the Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Religious Institute conducted university-level twinning programs with Al-Azhar University, Egypt, which conferred bachelor's, diploma, and certificate degrees. The Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Religious Institute established three departments, namely, Shariah Department, Usuluddin Department and Arabic Language Department. Meanwhile, the academic year begins on 2nd January 1996. Arabic is the medium of instruction, while English is a compulsory subject. The Kedah Darul Aman State Islamic Religious Institute has adopted a semester system in line with the system implemented at Al-Azhar University. To maintain academic quality, the academic staff are selected from reputable scholars from both within and outside the country, especially from Middle Eastern countries with a doctoral degree or equivalent.

Starting from 2017, the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), UniSHAMS, officially offered the Diploma in Islamic Studies (DIS) program for the June/2017 intake session for the first time. The offering of this DIS program was targeted by the Kulliyyah as a feeder to attract students from this program to continue their studies in any field of Islamic Studies at the bachelor's degree level offered at UniSHAMS. The duration of this DIS program is 5 semesters of study and covers various core courses in the field of

Islamic Studies such as Usuluddin, Qur'an and Sunnah, Shariah and Arabic Language. However, the language of instruction for teaching and learning in this program is more flexible as it utilizes a mixture of several languages such as Malay, Arabic and English. Moreover, the intake of students for this DIS program is also more open because the admission requirements offered are more general. Admission requirements for the DIS program include passing the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) / Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokasional (SPMV) with at least credits in 3 subjects and passing in one Arabic Language subject or one Islamic Studies subject; or passing O-Level with at least grade C in 3 subjects and passing one Arabic Language subject or one Islamic Studies subject; or passing the Certificate in Islamic Studies (Level 3, Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA)) with a minimum CGPA of 2.00; or other qualifications recognized as equivalent by the Malaysian Government (UniSHAMS Official Portal, 2024). It is undeniable that students with an educational background from religious schools have an advantage in mastering Arabic at the university level. The use of Arabic as the medium of instruction in religious subjects at school can provide advantages and added value to students in language mastery (Ariffin & Nordin, 2022).

Therefore, there are students enrolled in the DIS program at UniSHAMS seen to have less mastery of Arabic and face various challenges in the learning process such as being unable to communicate in Arabic, lack of extensive vocabulary and fear of making mistakes in speech. These challenges also make teaching activities difficult for DIS lecturers. Moreover, this situation also affects the achievement of Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) targeted throughout the DIS study period. This was further reinforced by the proposal from the DIS Curriculum Formulation Committee in 2018 after the completion of two semesters of DIS student intake. Among the suggestions put forward by this committee is to make Arabic Language a requirement for admission to the DIS program or to require students to take the Arabic Placement Test (APT) after admission to the DIS program. However, all these suggestions were rejected at that time because the DIS program was still new and there were concerns about a decline in DIS student intake for subsequent semesters at UniSHAMS.

Nevertheless, efforts to improve Arabic language proficiency among DIS students need to be continued because until now DIS students and lecturers still face challenges in the TL process. The COVID-19 pandemic situation has further exacerbated the Arabic Language TL problems at UniSHAMS. This is because UniSHAMS generally applies conventional TL methods, namely face-to-face learning. Online learning, mobile learning and blended learning methods are still at a minimal level (Azizan, 2022). Thus, this study was conducted to explore literature regarding the proficiency levels of the Arabic language among DIS students at UniSHAMS. Collectively, delving into relevant literature provides a foundation for improving Arabic language proficiency among DIS students at UniSHAMS, ultimately contributing to better educational outcomes and student success.

Literature Review
The proficiency level of Arabic language among university students has become a hotly debated issue among scholars, educators, and language experts. The trend of studies conducted by previous researchers, especially in the last six years from 2018 to 2023, clearly demonstrates that Malaysian students indeed face difficulties in mastering Arabic. Abdul Razak & Samah (2018) examined the problems and teaching strategies involving the size of Arabic vocabulary among students at the higher education level. The study took the form of text analysis, and the findings indicated that university students face serious challenges in mastering important vocabulary in learning. According to Abdul Razak & Samah (2018),

students need to master a minimum vocabulary size of between 3000-5000 words to facilitate smooth learning in their respective fields. Among the solutions proposed by the researchers is to pay attention to vocabulary teaching through TL activities in universities, whether inside or outside the lecture hall and tutorial.

Abdul Ghani et al (2019a) in their study examined Arabic sentence construction among students at Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI). This study was a survey using a questionnaire instrument on a randomly selected sample. The findings of this study showed that Arabic sentence construction among students in terms of morphology and syntax was at a high level, while in terms of lexical aspects, it was at a moderate level. The researchers suggested that Arabic TL should move in line with both theoretical and practical aspects. Additionally, vocabulary mastery should be enhanced because a wide vocabulary size can improve the level of Arabic sentence construction. Meanwhile, Abdul Ghani et al. (2019b) in another study attempted to identify the level of blended learning course adoption in Arabic language among undergraduate students at the University of Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This study also applied a quantitative approach through the distribution of questionnaires to randomly selected respondents. The study results showed that the blended learning approach had a positive effect on the students' learning process as they benefited greatly from it and wanted this approach to be implemented throughout the semester.

Alias (2019) identified the level of Arabic language achievement among students at Sultan Azlan Shah University (USAS) after using the Plickers application. A random group sampling method was used to select study respondents, and questionnaires were distributed to several respondent groups with and without Arabic language foundations. The study findings proved that the students' achievement level increased after using the Plickers application. Meanwhile, the combined results of both groups showed that students without Arabic language foundations had lower achievement levels compared to those with foundations. Alias (2019) also advocated for gamification approaches in pedagogy, particularly the use of the Plickers application by lecturers to assist weak Arabic language students.

Additionally, several past researchers such as Mohd et al (2019); Yusmaliana & Widodo (2019); Azizan et al (2019); Asbulah et al (2019) have also conducted studies on Arabic Language Teaching and Learning (TL) from different perspectives. Mohd et al (2019) attempted to present the idea of teaching Arabic to university students in Malaysia using educational technology based on the principles of Education 4.0. Through this study, Mohd et al (2019) criticized several traditional Arabic TL methods such as chalk and talk, extensive language drilling, and burdensome memorization methods. However, 'Generation Z' and 'Generation Alpha' are considered true 'digital natives' who prefer learning through technological mediums. Researchers conducted surveys to examine various aspects such as the feelings, perceptions, and opinions of respondents regarding Arabic language teaching using current educational technology applications and tools. The study findings provided evidence that university students indeed support Arabic language lecturers in using applications and technology tools in Arabic TL. However, traditional methods are still relevant as they are still favoured by some university students. Moreover, students also believe that the level of technology use by Arabic language lecturers is lower compared to lecturers of other foreign languages.

Yusmaliana & Widodo (2019) focused on reconstructing the Islamic education curriculum in facing the disruption era using a qualitative approach. The researchers

emphasized that the Islamic education curriculum needs to be adjusted according to the changing times. Additionally, the researchers also suggested that the Islamic education curriculum should be integrated with digital technology-based learning tools as this greatly assists in the development of Islamic character and values among students. Furthermore, Azizan et al (2019); Asbulah et al (2019) in their respective studies also focused on TL issues among university students. The TL issues examined in Asbulah et al (2019) study is related to Tahfiz Wal Qiraat students' perceptions of Arabic language learning and the level of Arabic TL processes. The researchers revealed that the intertwining technique in teaching with Tahfiz Wal Qiraat students, which involves linking Quranic verses in Arabic language teaching, is highly appropriate. Additionally, Asbulah et al (2019) study is slightly different as it is more focused on Arabic collocation learning strategies for students. This study involved 8 public higher education institutions (IPTA) with students at the intermediate level. Among the improvement suggestions proposed by the researchers include the application of sub-strategies in the learning process such as identification, mastery of techniques (understanding, repetition, highlighting, dictionary, social, and imagery), and application.

Similarly, more recent studies conducted by several researchers such as Abdul Razak et al (2020); Zaini et al (2020); Nawi (2021); Zaini et al (2021); Radzi et al (2021); Asbulah (2021); Ritonga et al (2021); Sallam et al (2021) have highlighted the difficulties in Arabic TL and Islamic Studies. These difficulties include students' inability to master a large Arabic vocabulary (Abdul Razak et al., 2020), the need for longer Arabic language learning periods Zaini et al (2020), differences in educational background influences (Zaini et al., 2020), the challenging transformation direction of Islamic Studies field Nawi (2021), concerns or anxiety about Arabic language subjects Radzi et al (2021), low and less satisfactory knowledge levels of Arabic language collocations Asbulah (2021), the importance of updating learning objectives to achieve Arabic language proficiency levels Ritonga et al (2021), students' difficulties in reading and writing, and lecturers' lack of creative, logical, and inductive skills (Sallam et al., 2021).

Moreover, the findings of the study by Sallam et al (2021) clearly indicate that several challenges also exist on the part of UniSHAMS lecturers in the Arabic TL process. These challenges include lecturers having weak skills in delivering information to students easily due to using a language level that exceeds the students' comprehension. Additionally, lecturers' resort to traditional teaching methods, such as *talaqqi* and reading only, due to a lack of emphasis on reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, lecturers often choose reference books that are difficult for students to understand. Additionally, the study results also found several challenges at the university level. These challenges include a lack of Arabic language courses or basic skills training, especially in listening, speaking, and writing skills. There is also an absence of creating an academic atmosphere outside of learning hours, hindering students' acquisition of speaking skills. Furthermore, there is a lack of designated break times set by the university between teaching hours, leading lecturers to rush to complete the syllabus throughout the semester. However, it's important to note that this study is limited to one subject in the field of Islamic studies offered at UniSHAMS and represents a sample of undergraduate students.

Furthermore, recent studies have been conducted by several researchers, including (Ruslan et al., 2022; Fadzil et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2022a; Ismail et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2022b; Adam & Wan Ahmad, 2022; Abd. Rahman et al., 2022; Sudi, 2022; Hamzah et al., 2022; Azizan, 2022). These studies identified several challenges in the implementation of Arabic Language Teaching and Learning (TL) at the university level. For instance, Ruslan et al

(2022) highlighted a lack of vocabulary, motivation, and self-confidence among students. Ismail et al (2022) pointed out challenges related to students' perception and learning environment, weaknesses in writing skills objectives, syllabus, teaching methods, and assessment in Arabic writing skills subjects. Abdullah et al (2022a) discussed a deficiency of Arabic language elements in university programs, while Adam & Wan Ahmad (2022) observed students' weakness in using appropriate nouns and verbs spontaneously, leading to a decrease in motivation for communication.

As well, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped education at the university level, posing new challenges to students and lecturers. Abd. Rahman et al (2022); Azizan (2022) identified these challenges in their respective studies. Abd. Rahman et al (2022) outlined five obstacles in the TL process due to the pandemic, including student and lecturer readiness, the stigma against online teaching, infrastructure readiness, the negative impact of technology, and the importance of continuous *talaqqi*. Azizan (2022) summarized various challenges faced by UniSHAMS lecturers and students in adapting to the new norm of online learning, given its novelty and incomplete development at UniSHAMS.

Researchers such as Fadzil et al (2022); Hamzah et al (2022); Abdullah et al (2022b); Sudi (2022) suggest several solutions in addressing Arabic Language Teaching and Learning (TL) issues. According to Fadzil et al (2022), peer influence, early nurtured interest, and TL strategies aligned with students' cognitive levels can help build and enhance positive attitudes towards Arabic language learning. Hamzah et al (2022) proposed a blended learning approach based on problem-based learning to develop an effective learning model to optimize the achievement of learning goals in Islamic studies. Additionally, Abdullah et al (2022b) emphasize the importance of studying the need for learning Arabic among students, as it helps lecturers design Arabic language curricula or modules that are easier to understand, thereby enabling students to practice the language in their daily lives. Meanwhile, Sudi (2022) suggests that lecturers need to be equipped with sufficient skills, and Malaysian universities need to better prepare for the rapid development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the field of Islamic Studies.

Perhaps, Arabic is indeed crucial for mastering various knowledge fields. Students need to improve their Arabic comprehension skills. However, traditional teaching methods hinder this, especially for Islamic studies students. This affects their motivation to engage with Arabic texts. Effective reading strategies can help, but their adoption is low. Ali et al (2023) study introduces Arabic text reading skills using such strategies. It involved classroom observations and student assessments. The findings aim to advocate for a new teaching approach to improve Arabic proficiency, aligning with Malaysia's education goals for Islamic studies and Arabic education.

Augmented reality technology is widely used across various sectors, including education. While it's extensively applied to languages like Malay, English, Chinese, and others in the West, its use in learning Arabic in Malaysia, especially at public universities like University Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), remains relatively unexplored. Sahrim et al (2023) in his study investigates students' perceptions of augmented reality's utility in Arabic language learning at USIM. The findings indicate that most students responded positively and expressed readiness to use augmented reality for language learning. Overall, augmented reality presents a valuable tool for enhancing Arabic vocabulary comprehension among students.

Rushdi & Asbulah (2023) study examines student engagement in learning Arabic, focusing on their activities both inside and outside the classroom. It also aims to identify

factors influencing their engagement. Quantitative data was collected from 30 final year Islamic studies students through questionnaires, while qualitative data was gathered through interviews with five Arabic graduates. Analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS for questionnaires and Atlas.ti for interviews. Results indicate low engagement levels, particularly in productive aspects like speaking skills, with internal and environmental factors identified as key constraints. This study highlights the need for interventions to address these challenges and enhance student engagement in Arabic language learning.

Last but not least, Ismail et al (2023) study aimed to investigate the perspectives of Arabic language instructors at a Malaysian public university on teaching essay writing skills. The data collected from 12 participants from various universities; Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) and was utilized to develop the M-KMKBA Module (Modul Kemahiran Menulis Karangan Bahasa Arab) for Arabic essay writing. Through qualitative analysis of interview data, themes and categories were identified to inform the module's development. The findings showed unanimous agreement among instructors regarding the significance of employing diverse teaching methods, such as communicative, direct, interactive, eclectic, and translation methods, in the module.

After conducting a thorough literature review, it can be concluded that previous studies have consistently highlighted various challenges in mastering Arabic language among university students. However, to date, no specific study has examined the proficiency level of Arabic among DIS students at UniSHAMS in terms of TL.

Methodology
Research Design
This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a literature review methodology. The qualitative research design seeks to explore and understand complex phenomena, subjective experiences, and social interactions from the perspectives of the participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Data Collection
To gather data, the researcher utilized the library research method. Library research entails gathering information and data from existing sources available in libraries or digital databases. This method primarily involves reviewing and analysing previously published materials, including books, scholarly articles, journals, reports, theses, and other relevant documents. The aim of conducting library research is to identify and extract key literature pertaining to the particular subtopic being investigated.

Data Analysis
The collected data underwent analysis using content analysis and thematic analysis methodologies. Content analysis involves a systematic and impartial approach to examining qualitative data, which involves categorizing and interpreting the content of various mediums such as text, audio, video, or visual materials to identify recurring patterns, themes, and connections (Krippendorff, 2004). In this study, content analysis was employed to examine the research materials on a broader scale. Thematic analysis, on the other hand, focuses on identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning, commonly referred to as "themes," within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture the depth and complexity of qualitative data,

facilitating a comprehensive exploration of perspectives obtained from previous literature reviews.

Analysis and Discussions

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by university students in Malaysia regarding the proficiency level of Arabic language learning. Several studies have highlighted issues such as vocabulary mastery, sentence construction, adoption of blended learning approaches, achievement levels with technological interventions, and the impact of traditional teaching methods on students' engagement and comprehension skills. Additionally, the review acknowledges the significance of integrating digital technology into Arabic language teaching, especially in the context of Islamic education, and the potential benefits of augmented reality in enhancing vocabulary comprehension.

Despite the extensive research on Arabic language teaching and learning in various contexts, including university settings, there is a notable gap in specific studies focusing on the proficiency level of Arabic among students at UniSHAMS in terms of Teaching and Learning (TL). While the literature review provides insights into general challenges and solutions, there is a lack of targeted research addressing the unique needs and contexts of students at UniSHAMS, particularly those in the DIS students.

Besides, future research is recommended including key areas like proficiency assessment, teaching strategies, curriculum development, lecturer training, student support services and longitudinal studies. Addressing these future research recommendations can contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Arabic language teaching and learning at UniSHAMS, ultimately leading to the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms to enhance students' Arabic language proficiency and academic success. The key areas of proposed research recommendations are summarised in Table 1

Table 1

Key Areas of Proposed Research Recommendations

No.	Key Areas	Future Research Recommendations
1.	Proficiency Assessment	- Design and administer standardized tests to measure vocabulary size, grammar proficiency, reading comprehension, and speaking skills - Align assessments with Arabic language curriculum objectives at UniSHAMS - Supplement quantitative measures with qualitative assessments (interviews, focus groups) to capture student perceptions
2.	Teaching Strategies	- Explore innovative teaching approaches tailored to DIS students' needs - Investigate integration of technology-enhanced methods (e.g., augmented reality, online simulations) - Implement active learning strategies and real-world applications to enhance engagement

3.	Curriculum Development	- Assess existing curriculum to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for enhancement - Ensure alignment with learning objectives, industry standards, and emerging trends - Integrate culturally relevant content and interdisciplinary approaches
4.	Lecturer Training	- Provide pedagogical training, digital literacy, and technology integration skills - Offer professional development workshops, seminars, and peer mentoring programs - Foster collaborative learning communities among Arabic language instructors
5.	Student Support Services	- Establish language learning centres, tutoring services, and language exchange programs - Offer academic advising, counselling, and mentorship tailored to Arabic language learners - Develop online platforms and resources for additional support and guidance
6.	Longitudinal Studies	- Track students' progress in Arabic language learning over time - Employ mixed-methods research designs to combine quantitative proficiency measures with qualitative data - Examine language proficiency levels, academic performance, retention rates, and graduation outcomes

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the critical issue of Arabic language proficiency among students in the context of DIS students at UniSHAMS. Despite the significance of Arabic as the language of knowledge and instruction in this academic field, students face notable challenges in achieving fluency and proficiency. Through a qualitative exploration of literature and thematic analysis, this study underscores the urgent need for tailored interventions and effective teaching strategies to address these challenges. By informing the development of targeted TL activities, this research aims to support UniSHAMS in enhancing Arabic language proficiency among DIS students and ultimately contribute to their academic success and professional growth in the field of Islamic Studies.

This study makes significant theoretical and contextual contributions in several key areas. Firstly, it identifies a crucial gap in existing literature regarding Arabic proficiency among DIS students at UniSHAMS. While extensive research exists on Arabic language teaching and learning, there is a lack of targeted studies addressing the specific challenges faced by DIS students at UniSHAMS. Secondly, it provides insights into the unique difficulties encountered by DIS students in mastering Arabic, including vocabulary acquisition, sentence construction, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirdly, the study explores teaching and learning strategies like blended learning and technological interventions to address these challenges. Additionally, it offers actionable recommendations for future research and interventions,

aiming to enhance Arabic language teaching and learning at UniSHAMS. Last but not least, by informing tailored teaching activities, the research aims to improve Arabic proficiency among DIS students, thereby boosting academic success in Islamic Studies. In a nutshell, this study contributes to the existing knowledge by addressing a specific gap in the literature, providing insights into the unique challenges faced by DIS students at UniSHAMS, exploring effective teaching and learning strategies, and offering recommendations for future research and interventions. Its significance lies in its potential to inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at enhancing Arabic language proficiency and academic success among DIS students at UniSHAMS.

Acknowledgement

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