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### STUDENTS' ACTIVE ROLES IN ARABIC LANGUAGE DEBATE ACTIVITIES IN NDUM

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#### ABSTRACT

*Students' interest in learning Arabic as a foreign language is an important aspect that has to be addressed by language instructors. By addressing this affective factor, they will be able to cater the needs of the students, particularly in selecting relevant activities that suit the students' abilities and at the same time comply with the syllabus. This study explores the students' interest in learning Arabic using debates. It also intends to investigate the challenges faced and efforts made by students in the process of learning Arabic through debates. This is a single case study involving ten participants consisting of National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM) students from diverse backgrounds. The participants were interviewed, with the sessions recorded and saved in MP3 audio format. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically. The findings show that on the whole, the students have good interest in learning Arabic language through roleplay activities, but there are various challenges experienced by the students in the learning process. For example, the insufficiency of the vocabulary to express their ideas and the need to always translate it first. They also get demoralised when interacting with more fluent and proficient speakers. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated a persistent and satisfied effort as they feel like they are being challenged to be better while achieving the objective of the activity. This study provides some pedagogical recommendations in terms of prepping students with communicative function activities such as debates with several guidelines, particularly for minimising the constraints of students with basic Arabic language experience.*

*Minat pelajar untuk mempelajari bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa asing adalah aspek penting yang perlu diambil berat oleh pengajar bahasa. Melalui faktor afektif ini, mereka dapat memenuhi keperluan para pelajar, terutamanya dalam memilih aktiviti yang relevan dengan kemampuan pelajar dan pada masa yang sama selaras dengan sukatan pelajaran. Kajian ini meneroka minat pelajar mempelajari bahasa Arab menerusi aktiviti debat. Selain itu, cabaran yang dihadapi dan usaha yang dilakukan pelajar dalam proses pembelajaran tersebut turut dikaji. Kajian kes ini melibatkan sepuluh peserta dalam kalangan pelajar Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM) dari pelbagai latar belakang. Para peserta telah ditemu bual dan maklum balas mereka direkodkan menggunakan perakam dan disimpan dalam bentuk audio MP3. Rakaman tersebut kemudiannya ditranskripsikan secara verbatim dan dianalisis secara tematik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar keseluruhan mempunyai minat yang tinggi dalam mempelajari Bahasa Arab melalui aktiviti debat yang menonjolkan peranan aktif pelajar. Namun, terdapat pelbagai cabaran yang dialami oleh pelajar dalam proses pembelajaran; contohnya kekurangan*

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*perbendaharaan kata untuk menyatakan idea mereka dan keperluan untuk sentiasa menterjemahkan ayat terlebih dahulu. Walaupun terdapat cabaran, mereka telah menunjukkan usaha yang berterusan dan memuaskan kerana mereka berasa tercabar untuk menjadi lebih baik sekaligus mencapai objektif aktiviti tersebut. Kajian ini memberi implikasi terhadap pedagogi pengajaran, iaitu penyelidik mencadangkan pendekatan aktiviti debat sesuai untuk pembelajaran bahasa Arab dengan merujuk kepada beberapa garis panduan, khususnya untuk meminimumkan kekangan pelajar yang hanya mempunyai pengalaman bahasa Arab asas.*

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## Introduction

The National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM) is a public university that offers Arabic as a foreign language subject to undergraduates. There are two courses offered at the Language Centre, namely Arabic (I) and Arabic (II). These courses are offered as university core subjects and the students must first register Arabic (I) for one semester and Arabic (II) for a latter semester.

Based on informal discussions among Arabic instructors and students, there were some feedback from the students for the purpose of improving the teaching and learning methods as well as strengthening the existing Arabic courses offered at the university level. The feedback was obtained through informal interviews between the teaching staff and students, including students who have no Arabic language learning experience, which can create difficulty for them to communicate. Meanwhile, there is also a lack of exposure to an Arabic language learning environment that can give them the courage and confidence to practice the language.

In order to achieve this purpose, the Language Centre attempts to implement roleplay activities as often as possible in order to enhance students' confidence and capability to communicate in Arabic. One of the prominent activities is debates. These debate activities focus on vocabulary exposure. The previous Arabic language learning in NDUM were focused on classroom activities in the form of presentations, short sentences writing, language week activities and activities outside of the classroom. The debate activities were suggested to be implemented during Arabic II classes for this semester. The debate activities were proposed to be conducted for Arabic II this time from the beginning of the semester. These activities are more focused more on motivating students, rather than specifically on language errors and mistakes. The emphasis is on the students' willingness to engage, with every student having the opportunity to communicate with each other in Arabic. The students begin by referring to the statements prepared by themselves and at the same time practicing the use of sentences on their arguments, questions, and how to pronounce the preamble and closing in a debate. Students have the freedom to look at the notes because they are still at the intermediate level. The presented arguments need not be complex as compared to usual debate activities for students who already have a good grasp of Arabic.

This study explores the students' interest in learning Arabic using debates. It also intends to investigate the challenges faced and efforts made by students in the process of learning Arabic through debates. This is a single case study involving ten participants consisting of NDUM students from diverse backgrounds.

## Literature Review

Roleplay is an activity that associates students' active role in activities prepared by the lecturers. This approach is still significant until now as roleplay is part of the language learning process. This approach can stimulate students to be actively take part in learning languages as well as communicating in the target language. One of the roleplay approaches is debate activities. Ramlan et al. (2016) highlighted that academic debate is one of the active learning processes that enhances students' motivation in language learning. Good preparation throughout the process of learning and teaching using debate creates effective language learning. The aspects of preparation include presentations, students' participation in the classroom and peer interactions during the debate. These are some of the strategies that need to be

explored in language learning. Abdul Latif et al. (2018) also mentioned the significance of roleplay in ensuring that each student has to participate actively in the learning process. Thus, debate activities and being active learners through roleplay activities are among the essential approaches in learning a foreign language.

Roleplay is a part of the crucial elements in learning a language as this approach can help students to be more proactive and not solely dependent to the language instructors. However, an instructor must consider some other aspects of the students, such as their interest towards the target language. Interest is part of attitude and motivation components. Both attitude and motivation are vital in language learning as positive attitude creates high motivation and consequently will help the students to perform well in the language. Jabali (2018) highlighted that positive attitude is important and determines the learners' attitude towards the language being learnt. Since attitude are learned behaviours (Ganesha et al., 2019), students may show different attitudes that relate to the different learning environments. Motivation in language learning is a complex area that includes individual differences of integrative motivation and intrinsic motivation as well as identified regulation (Bower, 2019).

Studies on attitude and motivation have been extensively conducted in the context of foreign languages especially for non-native speakers. Gardner and Wallance (1972) established grounded motivation in research in a social psychological framework, whereas Dornyei (1994) is one of the scholars who conceptualised the elements of motivation particularly from the aspect of foreign language learning. Studies on attitude and motivation have been extensively conducted in the context of foreign languages especially for non-native speakers. Chalak and Kassaian (2010) examined Iranian students learning English as a foreign language. The study reported that non-native students in Iran have a positive attitude towards learning English. The finding helped curriculum planners to produce appropriate curriculum content. Sayadian and Lashkarian (2010) also focused on Iranian students learning English as a foreign language. Their study found that even though students have low-level attitude towards English speakers, they still have a positive attitude towards learning the language, while also having a good interest to the language itself. In this case, having low-level attitude towards native speakers does not mean they have similar attitude towards language learning. Nevertheless, both aspects of learning and good interest help the process of learning and teaching a foreign language.

Norris et al. (2011) studied higher education students' attitudes towards six foreign languages: Arabic, Mandarin, French, Germany, Korean and Spanish. The study revealed that the students have a high attitude and motivation in learning a foreign language, but Arabic is the least preferred language because the opportunities to use Arabic are not widely available in the US context. Thus, their findings explain that the opportunity of using a particular language can lead to students' positive attitude towards the language. Mona (2013) conducted a study on learning English as a foreign language for the university level for Arab students. She investigated the factors that negatively affect students' speaking skills at the Mhayyal and Almajardah Colleges of the King Khalid University. The study outlined that students who has low confidence leads to less ability to speak English in public and during telephone calls. The study also revealed that the educators did not implement strategies that build communication skills, such as addressing topics of debatable culture, presentations and activities that engage students in the process of teaching and learning the language.

On the contrary, the findings of Abdel-Rahman (2009) showed that students who are good at grammar do not portray the capability of speaking foreign language, which means that student having good grammar do not necessarily have the confidence and ability to speak in the target language. Liu (2019) investigated on language learning attitude and code switching. This study does not directly reflect to the language learning attitude, but is still part of the language context where students have multidimensional attitude towards code switching, which is sensitive to social and contextual information. The identification of attitude is crucial as it informs us of how the direction of interaction may evolve. This study involved Chinese-English bilinguals toward two types of switching to English in Mandarin discourse.

Ghazali Yusri et al. (2010) investigated university students' attitudes towards Arabic language learning especially for oral skills using qualitative data. The study focuses on elements of attitude, which include cognitive, affective and connective aspects. Based on their findings, students have positive attitude towards Arabic, but students who do not have Arabic language experience feel uncomfortable during the teaching and learning Arabic process when engaging students from different backgrounds. The study suggests that the teaching approach needs to be adapted by taking into account the diversity of Arabic language backgrounds as it has impact on students' attitude development.

Attitude and motivation are interrelated and relevant in teaching and learning a foreign language. Lee and Kim (2017) investigated on Taiwanese students in private institutions. Their finding shows that students' motivations towards learning Korean were basically stemmed from several key factors such as interest, desire, communication, teacher's personality and curriculum. The study suggests that relevant institutes should select these five factors as preference elements of motivation, while other factors such as friends, instrumental value, prospect, class time and method of teaching should also be taken into consideration. Huang and Wang (2013) examined the motivational elements of Chinese higher education students in learning English as a foreign language. The study showed that students with good achievement in learning a foreign language is associated with their motivation. The more students are interested in the language, the higher their achievement they will be. However, students who are motivated at language learning are not necessarily motivated until the end of the language course. For example, Jodaei et al. (2018) investigated on Iranian military officers who were taking part in an intensive course at the military's foreign language centre. Some motivated students became demotivated during the intensive course due to several factors, namely management issues, facilities, learning context, teacher-related factors, the intervention of regulations from the organisation, course timing, as well as assessment and planning. These factors might occur if the administrator is not an expert in preparing the specific course comprising of an effective learning and teaching process.

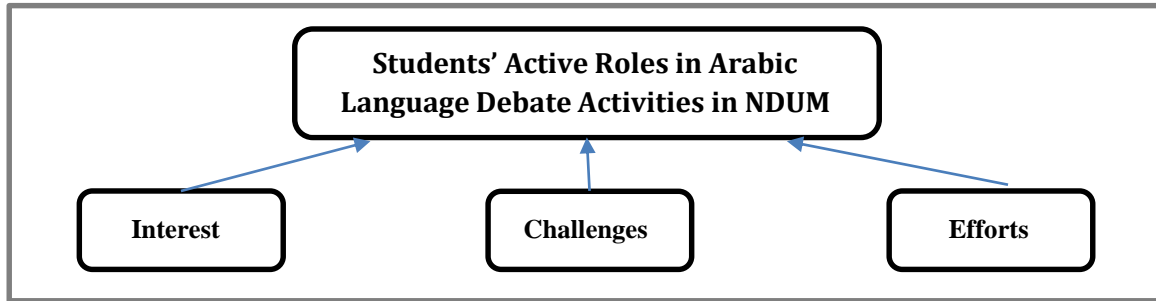
There are several approaches to creating a positive attitude in learning a foreign language, which include social media as a medium to learn a foreign language. Eren (2012) found that social media elements have a positive impact on students' attitude towards learning English as a foreign language for Turkish higher education students. However, classroom learning remains a major focus of foreign language learning. Other than that, students may enhance their confidence level using foreign language when they are in an effective language learning environment. Their good achievement also reflects of their positive attitude. Huang and Wang (2013) for instance suggested another alternative to develop student's positive attitude. They emphasised that language instructors should nurture students' confidence, create a harmonious environment by emphasising the concept of instructors as facilitators, and put effort to stimulate students' interest in learning foreign languages. Mona (2013) suggested that the number of students for each class, particularly speaking classes, should not exceed to 30 students as it affects students' attitude, and the process of learning and teaching speaking skills. Furthermore, positive attitude can be improved through strategies adopted by the students and lecturers.

Rivero-Menendez et al. (2018) investigated on students for Business Administration Degree from three universities in Madrid. They studied the differences between two variables, which are students' motivation and their learning strategies towards the accountancy subject while using Spanish or English. Their study showed that students who learned in English have more mature language strategies as compared to the counterparts. The English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) students have more confidence in learning their course, including the basic and complex concepts. They have more self-regulations, time study management skills and perseverance than their counterparts. Thus, they prefer to study their course in a foreign language with their high motivation of having more efforts towards that. The study also shows that non-EMI students spent less time in their studies and had superficial study techniques. This study also concluded that motivated students have more mature learning strategies. The lecturers too should provide supportive environment for language teaching and learning, including using suitable learning methodology, enhance student' perseverance as well as using reflective notes.

On the other hand, Shameem (2015) highlights learner's attitude as crucial element in maximising the learning and teaching output. Her finding showed that students are interested to learn English with equal emphasis to four types of language skills. They also showed their positive attitude towards the status of English as they adapt to a bilingual environment. The overall attitude of learners in her study was motivated by an integrative force as compared to an instrumental one. Thus, it is undeniable that both attitude and motivation are interrelated and contribute to language learning. Furthermore, Mona (2013) stressed that instructors should motivate students to overcome their fear while speaking using diverse strategies, including roleplay in the classroom and discussions.

Based on the aforementioned issues, this study is conducted to investigate the aspects of students' attitude, particularly their interest in Arabic language and their interest throughout the debate activities. Their challenges and efforts during the implementation of the debate activities are also highlighted. This study is important as there is a need to investigate NDUM students' attitude towards their learning and teaching process in order to obtain a clearer picture of the diverse approaches and curriculum guidelines that are tailored to the students' requirements. Consequently, the lecturers will be able to provide

appropriate activities in teaching Arabic as foreign language, spend less time with efficient activities, and develop positive attitude among the students who are learning Arabic language, particularly Arabic debate activities. The present study adapts the Attitude / Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) concept on attitude described in Gardner (1985). However, for the purpose of this paper, the researchers report on the interest part (interest towards Arabic language and interest towards language learning through roleplay activities, namely debate). The conceptual framework of the present study is shown in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1: The conceptual framework of the study.**

### Research Methodology

This is a single case study involving ten participants consisting of NDUM students of diverse backgrounds. The case study is very important in qualitative studies, specifically to explore participant's experience (Bryant, 2006). The participants were interviewed, with the sessions were recorded and saved in MP3 audio format. The audio was then transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically. Observations were also conducted in the class as part of the triangulation of the study. In qualitative research, triangulation adds depth to the data that is collected (Fusch et al., 2018). The observations then were coded in the coding form. The themes were qualitatively rated by two experts, which provided a Cohen Kappa inter-rater agreement of 0.75. The ten participants were identified as S1 to S10. The selection of students as participants in this study was based on the Arabic language course offered to particular programmes from different faculties. The profiles of the participants were outlined based on their gender, Arabic language learning experience, programme and year of study in the university, as summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of the profiles of the participants in the study.**

Name	Gender	Arabic Learning Experience	Programme	Year
S1	Female	Primary & Secondary school	Islamic Defence and Security	1
S2	Female	Primary school	Islamic Defence and Security	1
S3	Male	Primary school	Islamic Defence and Security	1
S4	Male	Primary school	Mechanical Engineering	3
S5	Male	Primary school	Human Resources	1
S6	Male	1 semester in UPNM	Islamic Defence and Security	1
S7	Male	1 semester in UPNM	Strategic Studies	1
S8	Female	Primary & Secondary school	Strategic Studies	1
S9	Female	Primary school	Strategic Studies	1
S10	Male	Primary school	Mechanical Engineering	3

Based on Table 1, six males and four female students participated in this study from Years 1 and 3. The participants comprised of three different programmes: S1, S2, and S6 are from Islamic Defence and Security Studies; S4 and S10 are from Mechanical Engineering; while S5 is from Human Resources. As compared to other faculties, the Engineering Faculty is the only faculty that offers foreign language subjects in the final year. The participant with least experience in Arabic language learning are S6 and S7, while most of them

have at least five years of learning experience, which is mostly from primary school. The researchers selected the participants from the aforementioned programmes because they would like to explore the participants' views from different perspectives and help them to enhance their teaching approach to tailor to the students' requirements to cultivate positive attitude and interest in Arabic language learning.

There are two research questions: Q1. How is the student' interest in learning Arabic using roleplay activities such as debate? Q2 What are the challenges faced and efforts made by students in the process of learning Arabic through debates?

## Findings

This section reports the findings of this paper based on the research questions:

### Q1. How is the student' interest in learning Arabic using roleplay activities such as debate?

This study found that students have good interest towards Arabic language. This can be explained from four different perspectives, namely students' interest towards the language itself, Arabic is easy to understand, Arabic is a bit difficult to learn but it can be learned, Arabic is an important language (relationship with native speakers and for *ibadah* purposes), as well as Arabic being a beautiful language.

#### a) Interest of the language itself

S1 mentioned that he is interested in Arabic language. He said: *"As I am interested in Arabic, I will not choose other language - I will choose Arabic."* It is clear that the language itself is his interest.

#### b) Arabic is easy to understand

S2 considered Arabic as easy to understand but he had to struggle for the memorisation part. He stated that *"I think Arabic language is easy to understand, but I have to struggle a little bit by memorising ..."* S5, S6 and S8 shared this same perception. According to S5: *"My view of Arabic is that it is an easy language to understand if we are good in using Arabic. For example, Arabic vocabulary is easier than English - when we answer the questions in the exam, we can answer a question even if we remember only one word and it helps."* S6 stated: *"To me Arabic is an easy language for us to learn as we always apply in performing ibadah."* S8 explained: *"In my opinion Arabic is easy to learn because based on my experience, having learned Arabic for 12 years, it is a language that is easy to learn."*

#### c) Arabic is a bit difficult to learn but it can be learned

While most of the participants agreed that Arabic is easy to understand, S10 had a different view. He claimed that Arabic is a bit difficult: *"In my opinion, while it is a paradise language, a Quranic language, it is a bit difficult to learn, but it can be learnt if we follow the learning process and focus on the Arabic language learning process itself."* He felt that Arabic is a bit difficult yet it can be learned and this implies the positive aspect of his attitude towards the Arabic language.

#### d) Important language - relationship with native speakers

S3, S4 and S5 considered Arabic as an important language. S3 refers to the importance of Arabic language when it comes to the relationship with native speakers: *"As for Arabic, I think that this language is also important, for all groups of people, as Malaysia has for example established relationships with countries that speak Arabic. Malaysia also has Al-Quran recitation programmes where the judges use Arabic in their commentary, which requires us to understand the language itself."*

#### e) Important language – for *ibadah* purposes

S4 and S9 considered Arabic as an important language for *ibadah* purposes. S4 said: *"It is good to learn Arabic because we as Muslims pray daily, so at least when we have basic Arabic, people still can say we know very little Arabic and yet understand what we do every day. The Arabic vocabulary is not the same as English."* In addition, S9 mentioned: *"For me, Arabic language is very important for us to apply it in our daily lives. We do not have to know complicated things, but when we speak Malay, we add in Arabic."*

**f) Beautiful language**

S6 expressed that Arabic is a beautiful language and explained about Arabic and ibadah (religious obligations): *"In my point of view, Arabic is a beautiful language because Arabic is the language that we always read but do not even notice in prayers."* S7 too considered Arabic as a beautiful language but he also refers to the structure of Arabic language, in particular vocabulary and grammar: *"My view of Arabic is that it is a beautiful language. This course can help us understand Arabic better, such using proper vocabulary and grammar."*

**Q2. What are the challenges faced and efforts made by students in the process of learning Arabic through debates?**

**Challenges**

There were several challenges faced by the participants. They did not understand new vocabularies / terminologies / proposed issue; they had to be critical thinkers; they have no basics in Arabic; and they had to find ways to cultivate self-confidence and develop their courage.

**a) Failure to understand new vocabularies / terminologies / proposed issues**

S1 agreed that he had difficulty in understanding new vocabularies, while S7 refers to the difficulty of debate terminologies. S1 said: *"When I came across things like that, the new vocabulary, I did not understand, so when we want to speak it, we did not actually understand what we want to talk about. Challenging times!"* S9 claimed that even though he highlighted the difficulty of argument skills, it still portrayed the challenges on the vocabulary itself. He stressed that: *"For me, the challenge is how to reply to the opposition team or the government argument. If I was the opposition team, what the government told I have to argue back. If I were the government, then I have to give a statement. It was too time consuming because I did not know what to say, I had to use Google Translate first, then I had to look at the book to see what the debator meant. I had to catch up with what he is trying to convey."* S10 too had the difficulty in understanding words: *"The challenge is when we argue in the debate, we do not understand some of the words from the opponent, so it is more difficult to respond logically to facts."* S2 felt that the challenge was the title, content and how to argue. He said: *"The challenge is the title. The title of the debate may be fun, but in terms of content, when we want to argue we have to find it in Arabic language, which is difficult to understand."* S7 mentioned: *"The first challenge is there will be some terminologies in debate - in English or Malay language that are quite difficult to translate into Arabic."* On the other hand, S8 felt that the challenge is the language itself as it is a foreign language. He said: *"The challenge I had was that Arabic is a foreign language, so I did not know many words and conversations, so I had to learn more."* He also claimed that the challenge is actually the debate activity itself: *"Besides that, there is a challenge in debate activity itself, how can we oppose the proposed issue because we need to oppose or support it, so we need to understand - if we do not understand, what can we do?"*

**b) Critical thinking as a challenge**

S3 felt that critical thinking is one of the challenges in debate activities. He said: *"The first challenge of the activity is that us need to think critically, since we want to think of the content of the debate based on the topic and it requires a lot of vocabulary. That is the challenge as a student where we learn with the basics we know first, which is a bit difficult for us to come up with."*

**c) Weak foundation of Arabic**

S4 mentioned that learning Arabic using debate activities was a challenge as he had previously only learned Arabic for one semester and he already forgotten the basics of Arabic that he learnt during his primary school: *"It is a challenge when we do not have basic knowledge, we get examples from the internet, after understanding a sentence and then the challenge is to understand the sentence and when to use it, because we cannot simply use it - for example, we can use it in the introduction, but not in the last part."*

#### **d) Difficulty in Cultivating Self-confidence**

The main challenge for S5 is on how he can cultivate his self-confidence. He said: *"The main challenge is to cultivate the self-confidence to stand in front of the people and try to communicate in a foreign language, which is Arabic and it is not our mother tongue."*

#### **e) Courage Problem**

Specifically, S6 felt that he has problem with courage: *"The challenge I faced was courage. In addition, there is a way to respond to the argument in the right way, not just talking."*

### **Students' Efforts**

The participants experienced challenges throughout Arabic language learning process, but they made their efforts to overcome the challenges effectively. The students asked their lecturer, motivated themselves, asked their friends and made preparations.

#### **a) Consultation with lecturers**

S1, S2, S3, S6 and S7 strategised their efforts by asking the lecturers on how to overcome their difficulties. For instance, S1 said: *"For words that I do not understand I will ask my lecturer, as well as use Google Translate."* S3 stated: *"One of the ways, for example, before the debate, when it comes to the proposed issue, if we do not understand, we can refer to the lecturer first. Ask him / her carefully and then we will understand. When we understand how to do it a little bit, we bring out the content that is based on what the lecturer taught."* Meanwhile, S6 mentioned: *"The way to overcome problem is by referring to the lecturer on how to respond, the lecturers taught us on how to answer, how to make an introduction and a summary. So I learned from that effort and responded correctly."*

#### **b) Self-motivation**

S4 highlighted that he motivated himself for debate activities. *"...how to deal with the challenges - I motivated myself by participating in the debate and prepared for it. For example, I prepared for the debate activities by asking my friends who have basics in Arabic and they teach me"*.

#### **c) Asking friends**

S4 preferred to ask his friends. He said: *"I asked my friends who have basic Arabic, they taught me everything."*

#### **d) Preparation strategies**

In terms of preparation, the students prepared themselves with several strategies, including strong arguments, using the Internet as a reference, searching for more information related to the debate activities, training, watching YouTube, using dictionaries and Google Translate, as well as having discussions with their team members.

##### **i) Strong arguments**

S5 said: *"Be prepared with thoughtful and strong arguments."*

##### **ii) Internet as a reference**

According to S7: *"We used the internet as a reference if we are alone, if we do not other resources"*, while S10 stated: *"If we have time we will go online and check from there."*

##### **iii) Search for more information**

S8 searched for more information as part of his preparation and for better improvement. He said: *"Every day I searched for more information, so that I know better."*

#### **e) Training**

Training was one of the ways to overcome the students' challenges in learning Arabic. S9 for instance said: *"I try to overcome the challenges by training. At first, I did not know how to reply to the arguments. I might be wrong, then in the second and third weeks, and after that, I improved."*



**f) Watching YouTube**

S9 watched YouTube as part of his efforts: *"I watch YouTube first, learnt the approach, studied the possible statements and arguments, as well as what government is going to say and how the opposition responds."*

**g) Using dictionaries and Google Translate**

S9 also applied dictionaries and Google Translate in learning vocabulary: *"For vocabulary, we have to read a lot, but as Arabic is not my daily language, it was difficult. To find the vocabulary, even it is a simple word, we have to look it up in the dictionary or Google Translate."*

**h) Discussion with team members**

S10 had discussions with his team members to overcome his challenges in learning Arabic using debate activities. He said: *"We discussed with the team members, and searched the Internet and try to find the solution based on the discussion."*

## DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the researchers reported the interests, challenges and efforts of the participants towards learning Arabic, specifically using roleplay in debate activities. The participants generally had good interest in Arabic. Although they were from diverse backgrounds, they showed positive feedback towards Arabic, with this pattern is mostly stemmed from their religious motivation. For instance, there was one participant who was interested in the language itself, four found that Arabic is easy to understand, while one of them considered Arabic as a quite difficult language but it can be learned. Five of the participants in the study felt that Arabic is an important language from two perspectives; the relationship with native speakers, second and for *ibadah* (religious obligations) purposes. This is in line with the findings of Norris et al., (2010), whereby students' preferences towards a foreign language are associated with the wide usage of the language in their environment.

The participants in this study faced challenges throughout the learning process in terms of not understanding new vocabularies, including specific terminologies and the title itself; the need for critical thinking; the insufficiency of Arabic language learning experience; as well as the challenge to cultivate self-confidence. Referring to their backgrounds, only two of the participants did not have basics in Arabic, except for their Arabic I course. They only learned Arabic in one semester (1 credit hour course for a duration of 14 weeks). Eight of them had already studied Arabic in primary and / or secondary schools. Interestingly, the participants with Arabic language background still felt Arabic is quite tough, while there were two participants with no Arabic basics who felt that Arabic is easy if they put in effort since Arabic is important as it is a part of their daily life. The participants with Arabic language background probably did not really practice the language and they tend to feel that the language was specifically tough for the debate activities and required effort each time. However, all of them agreed that the debate activities helped them to improve their pronunciation in order to participate actively in Arabic activities without hesitation, except for the first and second weeks as they were still trying to adapt with the activities within the period.

Most of the participants were from social sciences background, while only two of them were from engineering background. The different backgrounds in this case did not affect their interests towards Arabic language and the debate activities, due to their awareness and religious motivation. The religious motivation encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic orientations (Kaseh et al., 2010), as shown by the participants when they highlighted that they loved the beauty of the language itself and also because of their daily *ibadah*.

Despite of the challenges they faced, they managed to overcome all the challenges and did not give up throughout the Arabic learning process. The students considered the learning process as part of their responsibilities. Thus, they put in much effort, such as asking the lecturers, building self-motivation, asking friends, as well as making preparations for the subject, comprising of providing strong arguments for the debate activities, using the Internet as a reference, searching for more information through different mediums, training, watching YouTube, using dictionary and Google Translate, and having discussions with

team members. The participants use of YouTube and Google Translate to help them in learning Arabic demonstrates the findings of Eren (2013), whereby the usage of social media as part of language teaching and learning can develop a positive learning attitude towards learning foreign languages.

Even though there were students with less Arabic language learning experience, the students have shown that they were able to cultivate their confidence in speaking in front of the people. This contrasts with the findings of Mona (2013), who argued that students with low confidence level have low speaking skills. The students in this study have proven that they were able to overcome their low confidence at the beginning of the Arabic class by applying several strategies including motivating themselves. The strategies helped them a lot in their learning process. Rivero-Menendez et al., (2018) in their study too revealed that motivated students have more mature learning strategies and consequently enhance their language performance. Thus, lecturers should guide the students to enhance their study methodology, perseverance as well as reflectiveness. As highlighted by Liu (2019), the study on attitude is always important as the identification of attitude is crucial as it can guide lecturers on how the direction of interaction may evolve.

Based on lecturers' observations and reflective notes, the students had difficulty only at the beginning of the debate activities, specifically in their first week of semester. They then began to be more active in the Arabic classes as they slowly showed their interest towards the debate activities, since they realised that they managed to obtain numerous Arabic vocabularies and knew the accurate pronunciation. Consequently, the classes became interactive as they have to interact and discuss with each other. In other words, starting from the second week, they managed to adapt to the learning environment. Most of them became more confident and started to take part in the activities and were enthusiastic to take part during the roleplay sessions. It actively involved each of the students including the research participants, whereby they students engaged themselves with the learning environment and learnt in the group as teamwork, with each of them contributing to the tasks assigned and being responsible as they enjoyed the activities. They also helped each other throughout the preparation of argument, whether when they were from the government or opposition teams. They started to speak a lot in class using Arabic without hesitation although they had to refer to dictionaries, relevant websites and Google Translate. They enjoyed their learning time, which could be observed from their facial expressions, body language and from their cooperation. They managed to remember simple vocabularies and obtained experience on how to create simple yet suitable sentences for the debate preparation activities. In short, they showed their positive attitudes towards Arabic language and also the learning activities provided by the lecturers despite of having lack of vocabularies and being weak in grammar. Interestingly these findings differ from Abdel-Rahman's (2009) findings that almost all students had negative attitudes towards foreign languages. He also highlighted that being good in grammar does not provide a guarantee of a student's ability to speak in a foreign language. On the same note, Sayadian and Lashkarian (2010) found that low-level attitude towards native speakers, particularly in their case, English speakers, did not reflect the students' attitude towards the language as they showed their positive attitudes towards the language itself.

Students' attitudes also will differ when it comes to the environment of language use. The present study showed that the students considered Arabic as important and they had good interest towards the language. The opportunity to listen to the language through daily *ibadah* activities and Islamic programme such as Al-Quran recitation programmes (musabaqah al-Quran) increased their interest towards the Arabic language as they had the wide usage environment. This is consistent with the findings of Norris et al. (2011), whereby wide opportunities to use a foreign language will affect students' preferences towards learning that particular language. Their study also highlighted that the wide usage of a particular foreign language in a country contributes to the students' language preferences.

The findings of this study have significant implications to language education globally in terms of preparing relevant activities tailored to the syllabus. It also proposes some guidelines towards learning foreign languages, particularly Arabic, using roleplay activities such as debate. This approach helps the students to apply Arabic, as they have to be actively involved throughout the language learning process.

## CONCLUSION

In general, this study found that the participants had good interest in Arabic language itself. However, they faced difficulties specifically at the beginning of the semester. They put in much effort to ensure that they could participate in each debate with sufficient preparation. This study suggests that lecturers should create roleplay environments that help students to take part in the learning process actively. Debate

activities can be part of learning Arabic even for students without Arabic language learning experience with some guidelines. First, this activity should focus on developing the students' confidence to take part in language classes specifically to speak in Arabic. Second, the students should prepare their argument text beforehand. Therefore, they have to create at least a few simple sentences and refer to the dictionary, ask for the lecturers' help and opinions, engage in teamwork, and search for information from related websites. Third, the activity must involve students in a class of only 15 to 20 students to ensure that everybody has a chance to take part in the activity for each class session or every two sessions. Fourth, the lecturers must take into account the theme of the debate. It is advised to choose a simple title because the main purpose is to cultivate the student's confidence. Fifth, the lecturer should guide the students at the beginning session of the procedure of the activity. Then, after a few weeks, the students can be given the accountability to run the roleplay activities as being taught at the beginning of the semester.

However, this study had several limitations. The findings of the study cannot be generalised due to factors such as different policies implemented by universities on foreign language learning and the unique settings of the universities themselves. However, the findings from this single-case study could at least give a brief picture of students' attitudes towards Arabic language activities and helps the curriculum planners to plan suitable teaching and learning approaches that will cater for the students' requirements and develop their positive attitudes. It is hoped that this will motivate the students to perform well in the mastery of the language.

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