
Transforming Positive Language Attitudes into Communicative Performance: Evidence-Based Learning Strategies in Arabic Language Teaching

Fatwa Arifah^{1*}, Samsi Setiadi², R.A. Barnabas³, Puti Zulharby⁴, Haniah⁵

^{1,2,3,4}Arabic Language Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

⁵Arabic Language Education, UIN Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia

Email Address

fatwa.arifah@unj.ac.id

***Corresponding author**

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Abstract

Arabic learning in Indonesian universities has unique opportunities and challenges. Many students show great enthusiasm for the Arabic language and understand its relevance in the religious, academic, and professional spheres. However, their communication skills are often not in line with their positive language attitude. This gap between language attitude and communicative performance shows the need for more effective learning strategies. A 2025 study involving 166 students from the State University of Jakarta (UNJ) and UIN Alauddin Makassar found a strong correlation between language attitudes and communication performance ($r = 0.650$, $p < 0.01$). However, positive attitudes alone do not guarantee communication success. At the qualitative stage, nine students with different attitude-performance profiles were interviewed to explore the supporting and inhibiting factors of communication performance. The results show that a supportive learning environment, lecturers who encourage active participation, collaborative interaction between students, and integrative motivation contribute to improved communication skills. Conversely, lecturer-centric learning, lack of authentic practices, and limited interaction during online learning are major obstacles. This study recommends the Four Dimension Communicative Model, which includes: 1) Environmental Activation; 2) Pedagogical Innovation; 3) Psychological Empowerment; 4) Social Integration, as a comprehensive approach to transform students' positive attitudes into better communication performance.

Introduction

Language attitudes have long been recognized as a fundamental determinant in second language acquisition, influencing learners' motivation, persistence, and communicative outcomes (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Positive language attitudes (encompassing cognitive beliefs about language importance, affective emotional responses, and conative behavioral intentions) are consistently associated with successful language learning. However, the relationship between attitude and actual communicative performance is not always linear. In foreign language contexts, where opportunities for authentic language use are limited, even highly motivated learners may struggle to achieve fluent communication (Ladegaard, 2000; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2017).

Arabic language learning in Indonesian universities holds both religious and academic importance. As the language of the Qur'an and Islamic scholarship, Arabic carries deep spiritual and cultural significance (Nidia et al., 2022; Seymour-Jorn, 2004). At the same time, it functions as a professional and academic asset, particularly for future educators

and researchers. Students in Arabic Language Education programs generally show enthusiasm and a positive attitude towards the Arabic language. However, this positive language attitude is not directly proportional to the student's communication performance. Previous research has demonstrated that motivation and attitude are significant predictors of Arabic learning achievement among Indonesian students (Inah & Khairunnisa, 2019; H. Rahman & Maisurah, 2024; K. Rahman & Baharudin, 2023a; N. F. Rahman, 2018). Nevertheless, this positive language attitude is not always reflected in communicative performance. Many learners who admire the Arabic language and value its spiritual significance still find it difficult to speak Arabic fluently, especially when communicating with Arabic speakers.

This problem is a finding from our research (2025) on 166 students of the Arabic Language Education Program at UNJ and UIN Alauddin Makassar. Statistically, there was a strong positive correlation between language attitudes and communication performance ($r = 0.650$; $p < 0.01$). But the distribution of grades is an important point of concern, where 57.8% of students have a very positive attitude, while only 17.5% show high communicative performance; The majority are at a moderate level, and 23.5% are underperforming. In other words, this study reveals that having a positive attitude that is characterized by a love and appreciation for language does not necessarily make a person have a high communication performance. These findings point to a persistent language attitude and communicative performance gap, suggesting that a positive disposition toward Arabic does not automatically lead to strong communicative ability. This contradiction warrants deeper exploration to understand why such a gap persists among highly motivated learners.

Several contextual factors in Indonesia compound the problem. As a non-Arabic-speaking environment, Indonesia offers minimal exposure to natural Arabic use. Students often lack opportunities to practice communication beyond the classroom, which inhibits the development of oral fluency (Pikri, 2022; K. Rahman & Baharudin, 2023b; Shafie et al., 2019). Moreover, traditional Arabic pedagogy in Indonesia has long emphasized grammar-oriented learning (focusing heavily on *nahwu* and *sharaf*) at the expense of communicative practice (Almelhes, 2024). While this approach strengthens reading and textual analysis skills, it does not sufficiently prepare learners for real-world communication. Reishaan and Taha (2008) describe this phenomenon as a competence–performance gap: students may possess linguistic knowledge but lack the confidence and fluency to use it communicatively.

Additional challenges arise from Arabic's sociolinguistic complexity. The coexistence of *fusha* (Modern Standard Arabic) and *amiyah* (colloquial dialects) creates comprehension barriers for learners trained exclusively in formal Arabic (Murad, 2007; Rabab'ah et al., 2022). Psychological variables (such as performance anxiety and low self-confidence) further mediate the link between knowledge and communicative use (Aladdin, 2010, 2013; Knowles, 2000). Environmental and pedagogical factors also play crucial roles: lack of authentic communication opportunities, limited teacher and student interaction, and overemphasis on grammatical accuracy have all been shown to weaken learners' motivation and communicative engagement (Shaalán, 2023; Shehata, 2024).

Research on language attitudes in Arabic learning (Hassan et al., 2024; Zainol Abidin et al., 2012) consistently emphasizes that attitudes are multidimensional and context-dependent. Religious beliefs, cultural identity, learning experiences, and instructional practices shape them. Teachers' verbal communication and classroom strategies can significantly modify these attitudes over time (Abdul Kadir & Ismail, 2021; Ianos et al., 2017). Yet, despite this extensive body of work, few studies have explored how positive attitudes can be transformed into communicative performance.

Accordingly, the central research problem addressed in this study is: Why do students with positive attitudes toward Arabic often fail to achieve high levels of communicative performance? The purpose of this paper is to identify the underlying causes of the language attitude and communicative performance gap among Arabic learners and to propose Arabic language learning strategies that effectively transform positive attitudes into communicative performance.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach through an exploratory case study design to understand how positive language attitudes can evolve into communicative performance among Arabic learners in Indonesian universities. The research was developed from earlier quantitative findings that indicated a strong correlation between students' attitudes and their communicative performance ($r = 0.650$, $p < 0.01$), but also showed a noticeable gap between what students feel and what they can actually perform.

Within an explanatory sequential mixed-methods framework, the qualitative phase was designed to explore students' real experiences, perceptions, and daily learning practices to uncover the factors that either support or hinder the transformation of positive attitudes into communicative competence. The research was conducted at two major institutions: Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) and UIN Alauddin Makassar. Both were chosen for their curricular variation, geographical representation, and national significance in Arabic language education.

Participants were drawn purposively from the 166 students who took part in the quantitative phase. 9 students were selected to represent different profiles of language attitudes and communicative performance. The selection covered a range of perspectives: 3 UNJ students who showed both high attitudes and high performance; 3 UIN Alauddin students with more neutral or moderate profiles; 1 UNJ student with a lower attitude score; 1 UNJ student from a non-pesantren background; and 1 UIN Alauddin student from a pesantren background.

This combination allowed the study to capture a rich variety of learning experiences across institutional and personal contexts. Each participant was assigned a coded identifier to protect confidentiality throughout the research process.

Table 1. Interview Participant Profiles

Profile	Institution	Attitude Pattern	Performance Level
P1-P3	UNJ	Positive	High
P4-P6	UIN Alauddin	Neutral	Moderate

P7	UNJ	Extreme (Negative-leaning)	Low
P8	UNJ	Positive	Emerging
P9	UIN Alauddin	Positive	Moderate

Results and Discussion

The Language Attitude and Communicative Performance Gap in Arabic Language Learning

1. Positive Attitudes and Limited Communicative Practice

Despite holding favorable attitudes, many students reported limited use of Arabic outside the classroom. This echoes Ladegaard's (2000) argument that positive language attitudes do not automatically lead to corresponding linguistic behavior, highlighting the need to examine intervening variables. As one participant reflected, "*Upaya menerapkan kosakata atau struktur baru sebenarnya dilakukan dengan niat agar semakin terbiasa menggunakan bahasa Arab, namun proses ini tidak selalu berjalan lancar karena minimnya kesempatan dan lingkungan yang mendukung.*"

This finding supports Tódor and Dégi's (2016) view that conducive environmental and instructional factors must accompany positive attitudes to produce communicative outcomes. It also reinforces Masgoret and Gardner's (2003) assertion that while attitudes are vital predictors of success, they function effectively only when supported by appropriate pedagogical and contextual conditions.

2. The Role of Learning Environment

A central barrier identified by most participants was the lack of Arabic-speaking environments beyond formal instruction. Students frequently mentioned the absence of spaces to practice conversation regularly, such as language clubs or informal gatherings. Statements such as "*Minimnya wadah atau forum untuk melatih percakapan secara konsisten*" and "*Lingkungan di luar kampus yang jarang menggunakan bahasa Arab*" illustrate this constraint.

These observations align with Pikri's (2022) and Rahman and Baharudin's (2023) findings that the language environment plays a decisive role in Arabic learning outcomes. Shaalan (2023) similarly emphasized that exposure-rich environments are essential in Arabic as a Foreign Language contexts. Students from pesantren backgrounds especially missed immersive atmospheres: "*Keinginan untuk memiliki lingkungan seperti di pesantren, di mana bahasa Arab digunakan 24 jam sehari tanpa memandang benar atau salah, dianggap penting karena dapat mempercepat kemampuan berbicara.*"

The evidence suggests that creating supportive linguistic ecosystems (where Arabic is used naturally) can bridge the gap between attitude and performance. It aligns with Hassan et al. (2024), Alhamami (2022), and Yusuf (2023), who argued that environments fostering authentic communication significantly enhance both learner attitudes and achievement.

3. Peer Interaction and Social Influence

Another key factor influencing communicative performance was social interaction. Students who engaged with peers and lecturers using Arabic reported greater fluency and confidence. Typical remarks included: *“Lingkungan yang membiasakan akan menjaga kelancaran berbahasa,”* and *“Dosen yang interaktif dan teman yang aktif berbahasa Arab mendorong motivasi.”*

This finding corroborates Abdul Kadir and Ismail's (2021) research on teachers' verbal communication practices, which showed that interactive and encouraging communication fosters positive attitudes and active use. Similarly, Ianos et al. (2017) demonstrated that sustained social interaction within supportive communities strengthens language attitudes over time. Hence, Arabic learning cannot rely solely on individual motivation. It must be socially reinforced through collaborative, interactive contexts (Gass & Varonis, 1994; Mahmoodi & Moazam, 2014a; Partono et al., 2021).

4. The Impact of Online Learning

Participants consistently reported that online learning environments hindered the development of communicative competence. One student explained, *“Rasa senang mengikuti perkuliahan bahasa Arab ada ketika dilakukan secara tatap muka, karena interaksi lebih natural dan kesempatan praktik lebih banyak. Namun saat daring, suasana belajar menjadi berbeda. Interaksi terasa kaku dan komunikasi tidak mengalir.”*

This finding nuances the optimistic view of digital learning. While Mahdi and Kusnandar (2022) noted that YouTube and online media can improve attitudes, the current study reveals that synchronous online classes often disrupt spontaneous interaction and natural speech patterns. In line with Moore (2020), the results emphasize that communicative competence depends not merely on the frequency but on the quality and authenticity of interaction.

Post-pandemic, this has strong pedagogical implications: Arabic communicative instruction should prioritize face-to-face interaction and, where online methods are used, integrate more dialogic and reflective components to preserve authenticity (Alhamami, 2022; Harrison & Laco, 2022; Lucia Hernawati & Praharesti Eriany, 2021; Mabruri & Hamzah, 2021).

5. The Relation between Confidence, Anxiety, and the Communicative Performance

A recurrent issue among participants was a lack of confidence to use Arabic spontaneously, despite having adequate grammatical knowledge. Students feared making mistakes or being judged, preferring to wait until sentences were grammatically perfect. However, high-performing students held a contrasting view: *“Keberanian berbicara dipandang lebih penting dibanding menunggu kalimat sempurna, karena inti komunikasi adalah pesan dapat tersampaikan.”*

It mirrors Knowles's (2000) and Reishaan and Taha's (2008) discussions, distinguishing linguistic competence from performance. Confidence functions as a mediating factor between knowledge and actual use; without it, knowledge remains passive. The "courage-over-perfection" mindset found among proficient students supports Aladdin's (2013)

argument that excessive focus on accuracy inhibits fluency. Effective pedagogy, therefore, must cultivate tolerance for error and emphasize communication as meaning-making rather than grammatical precision (Molinaro et al., 1990).

6. Exposure to Native Speakers

Most participants reported rare opportunities to interact with native Arabic speakers, and when such interactions occurred, they faced difficulties due to speech rate and dialect variation. Comments such as "*Native berbicara cepat dan mencampur fusha dengan amiyah*" highlight the challenge of Arabic diglossia noted by Murad (2007) and Rabab'ah et al. (Rabab'ah et al., 2022).

Shehata (2024) further argues that limited exposure to dialectal diversity in formal education leaves learners unprepared for real communication. Yet, students viewed interaction with native speakers as an ideal goal: "*Interaksi dengan penutur asli dianggap kesempatan berharga untuk memahami budaya Arab dan melatih kelancaran berbicara secara alami.*" It reflects the integrative motivation described by Masgoret and Gardner (2003), where learners aspire to connect with the cultural and social dimensions of the target language.

7. Educational Background and Motivation

Students with pesantren backgrounds generally had stronger grammatical foundations and prior exposure to Arabic. They regarded this background as both a strength and a source of realism about linguistic challenges: "*Pengalaman di pesantren memberi dasar yang kuat, tetapi juga menumbuhkan sikap realistis terhadap kesulitan bahasa Arab.*" Conversely, students from non-pesantren backgrounds described their lack of prior knowledge as a motivating force: "*Latar belakang non-pesantren justru menjadi pemicu rasa penasaran dan semangat belajar hal baru.*"

This finding challenges deficit assumptions about non-traditional learners, supporting Ianos et al. (2017) and Anandi (2021), who observed that positive attitudes and motivation can develop progressively through meaningful learning experiences. Family encouragement also played a key role, particularly among pesantren graduates. It is echoing Mukminin's (2016) findings that extrinsic motivation from family and community often evolves into intrinsic drive over time.

8. Pedagogical Balance: Grammar and Communication

Across all profiles, students identified an imbalance between grammar instruction and speaking practice. They advocated for more communicative activities, such as role play, group discussion, and language clubs. One participant remarked, "*Porsi praktik berbicara harus lebih banyak daripada teori, dan materi perlu dikaitkan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari.*"

It resonates with Almelhes's (2024) recommendation for integrating communicative approaches and authentic materials in Arabic education. Similarly, Tódor and Dégi (2016) emphasize aligning instruction with learners' real-life contexts. Participants' desire for intellectually engaging discussion topics, such as theology or Middle Eastern thought, further reflects a comprehensive understanding of Arabic as both a communicative and

intellectual language, requiring a pedagogy that unites practical fluency and conceptual depth.

9. Arabic Language and Religious Identity

Finally, the emotional and spiritual dimensions of Arabic learning emerged as deeply intertwined with students' religious identity. Many described Arabic as "*bahasa Al-Qur'an*" and "*pintu memahami ilmu agama*." It aligns with Nidia et al. (2022) and Seymour-Jorn (2004), who found that Arabic learning among Muslim students is strongly linked to religious motivation and identity.

Even when faced with challenges, this emotional connection remained resilient: "*Rasa kagum tetap ada meski sadar bahwa penguasaan bahasa memerlukan waktu panjang*." As Rahman (2018) and Hassan et al. (2024) argue, such intrinsic, value-based motivation forms a stable foundation for sustained learning.

High-performing students further confirmed that positive attitudes enhance confidence and willingness to practice: "*Sikap positif membuat tidak takut salah dan mendorong terus mencoba*." This dynamic relationship, where positive attitudes reduce fear, increase practice, and thus improve performance, reflects the reciprocal cycle proposed by Masgoret and Gardner (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2015; Mahmoodi & Moazam, 2014b; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

Transforming Language Attitudes into Communicative Competence: Strategic Approaches in Arabic Language Learning

The proposed strategies are grounded in a four-dimensional transformation model derived from the research findings: 1. Environmental Activation: Creating immersive Arabic-speaking environments (Pikri, 2022; K. Rahman & Baharudin, 2023b; N. F. Rahman, 2018; Shaalan, 2023); 2. Pedagogical Innovation: Rebalancing theory and communicative practice (Almelhes, 2024; Reishaan & Taha, 2008); 3. Psychological Empowerment: Building confidence and reducing anxiety (Aladdin, 2013; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003); 4. Social Integration: Leveraging peer support and native speaker interaction (Abdul Kadir & Ismail, 2021; Seymour-Jorn, 2004).



Figure 1. Transformation Model of Arabic Language Teaching Strategy

Based on these four interrelated dimensions, the study outlines multiple strategic approaches in Arabic language learning that facilitate the transition from positive attitudes to active communicative performance.

Table 2. Arabic Language Immersion Program (ALIP)

No	Strategy	Strategy Components
1	Arabic Language Immersion Program (ALIP)	Arabic-Only Zones (AOZ) Arabic Day/Week Events Buddy System for Daily Practice

The First strategy: Arabic Language Immersion Program (ALIP). This strategy, based on the research findings, revealed that the primary barrier to communicative performance was the absence of Arabic-speaking environments: "*Minimnya wadah atau forum untuk melatih percakapan secara konsisten.*" It directly connects to Pikri's (2022) argument that language environments play a crucial role in improving Arabic learning abilities, and Rahman and Baharudin's (2023b) demonstration that linguistic environments significantly influence vocabulary mastery.

Shaan (2023) emphasizes that the learning environment in Arabic as a Foreign Language contexts is particularly critical, as learners lack the naturalistic exposure available in Arabic-speaking countries. High-performing students in this study consistently attributed their success to immersive contexts: "*Lingkungan yang membiasakan akan menjaga kelancaran berbahasa.*" Based on Pikri's (2022) research, creating immersive language environments can increase Arabic exposure outside formal instruction, leading to the normalization of Arabic use in informal contexts and the development of automaticity in conversational patterns. Rahman and Baharudin (2023b) found that enhanced linguistic environments directly correlate with improved vocabulary acquisition and speaking fluency.

Table 3. Flipped Communicative Language Teaching (F-CLT)

Strategy	Strategy Components
2 Flipped Communicative Language Teaching (F-CLT)	Pre-Class Online Modules In-Class Communicative Practice Post-Class Reflection and Application

The second strategy is Flipped Communicative Language Teaching (F-CLT). This strategy is based on the research-identified theory-practice imbalance and ineffective online learning as major obstacles: "*Porsi praktik berbicara harus lebih banyak daripada teori*" and "*Pembelajaran daring... percakapan terasa kaku, sulit berkembang secara spontan.*" This finding aligns with Reishaan and Taha's (2008) comprehensive discussion of the competence-performance relationship, where they argue that linguistic competence must be actively transformed into performance through appropriate practice opportunities. Almelhes (2024) provides extensive evidence that effective Arabic language acquisition requires communicative approaches that prioritize meaningful interaction over grammatical explanation. Moore (2020) emphasizes that communicative competence develops through authentic, contextualized language use rather than through knowledge transmission alone.

Table 4. Formative Assessment for Learning (FAL)

Strategy	Strategy Components
3 Formative Assessment for Learning (FAL)	Continuous Low-Stakes Assessment Descriptive Feedback Over Grades Growth-Oriented Assessment Culture

The Third strategy is Formative Assessment for Learning (FAL). This strategy is based on the research that revealed that fear of judgment and focus on grammatical perfection inhibited communication. Traditional assessment models that prioritize accuracy over fluency reinforce these fears. As one participant noted, successful communicators believe *"Keberanian berbicara dipandang lebih penting dibanding menunggu kalimat sempurna."* Aladdin (2013) identified that excessive focus on errors is a primary demotivating factor in Arabic classrooms. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) found that assessment approaches significantly influence language attitudes, with supportive formative assessment strengthening motivation while punitive summative assessment undermining it. Reishaan and Taha (2008) argue that assessment must distinguish between competence (knowledge) and performance (use), with communicative assessment focusing on actual communication success rather than solely on grammatical accuracy.

Table 5. Collaborative Learning Communities (CLC)

Strategy	Strategy Components
4 Collaborative Communities (CLC)	Learning Arabic Language Club (Nadi al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya) Peer Mentoring Program Online Learning Community Platform

The Fourth strategy is Collaborative Learning Communities (CLC). This strategy based on social support emerged as a critical facilitating factor: *"Dosen yang mengajar secara interaktif dan teman yang aktif berbahasa Arab mendorong motivasi"* and *"Dukungan teman, dosen yang membiasakan penggunaan bahasa Arab."* Students explicitly requested: *"Adanya komunitas atau klub bahasa di luar jam kuliah juga dianggap penting agar mahasiswa memiliki ruang latihan tanpa tekanan penilaian."* Abdul Kadir and Ismail (2021) demonstrated that interactive teaching and peer engagement significantly improve student attitudes and language use. Ianos et al. (2017) found that supportive social environments can transform language attitudes over time, suggesting that community building is a powerful intervention strategy. Pikri (2022) and Shaalan (2023) emphasize that language learning communities extend the language environment beyond formal instruction, creating naturalistic practice opportunities essential for developing communicative competence.

Conclusions

This study sought to answer the central question of why students who possess positive attitudes toward Arabic often fail to achieve high levels of communicative performance. The findings reveal that a lack of motivation does not cause the gap between attitude and performance, but rather contextual and pedagogical limitations that prevent positive dispositions from evolving into communicative competence. The study concludes that learners' attitudes toward Arabic require supportive environmental, psychological, and social conditions to translate into active language use.

To address this issue, the research proposes a four-dimensional transformation model encompassing environmental activation, pedagogical innovation, psychological empowerment, and social integration. These interrelated dimensions form an evidence-based framework that enables the conversion of positive attitudes into communicative ability through immersive environments, balanced instruction, confidence building, and authentic interaction. The study thus provides both a theoretical and practical contribution by reframing Arabic language education from a knowledge-based paradigm to a communicative and learner-centered orientation.

Future research should examine how these four dimensions interact over time and how technological and institutional innovations can reinforce the transformation process. Longitudinal and intervention-based studies are especially recommended to test the effectiveness of the proposed strategies and to refine the model for broader application across diverse Arabic learning contexts.

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Author's Profile:

- a. Full Name (without a degree): Fatwa Arifah
- b. Institution: Universitas Negeri Jakarta
- c. Email: fatwa.arifah@unj.ac.id
- d. Education: Doctoral
- e. Research interest: Arabic Language Education, Gender and Language, Critical Discourse Analysis, Curriculum and Teaching Material Development.