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From arabic lives to arabic activation: reimagining the starting point of arabic learning in islamic higher education

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Abstract

Arabic education in Islamic higher education often begins with students' formal proficiency, potentially overlooking Arabic already embedded in their religious and everyday lives. This article asks how such pre-existing Arabic repertoires can become a meaningful starting point for further language development and how interpersonal relationships contribute to this process. Drawing on the concepts of Arabic Lives, language activation, and relationally situated language learning, this theoretical article develops the concept of Arabic Activation and proposes a developmental framework for Muslim learners in Islamic higher education. The framework conceptualizes Arabic Activation as the relationally mediated process through which familiar Arabic becomes consciously accessible, semantically meaningful, socially usable, and transferable across contexts. It proposes four interconnected developmental modes: Arabic Activation, Live Arabic, Academic Arabic, and Program-Specific Arabic. Within the first-year residential context of Islamic higher education, the first three months constitute an Activation Foundation, followed by a one-year developmental window monitored through five longitudinal checkpoints: T0, UTS1, UAS1, UTS2, and UAS2. The conceptual contribution lies in repositioning the beginning Arabic learner from a deficit-oriented category toward a repertoire-sensitive and relationally situated starting point. The framework further positions interpersonal relationships not merely as learning contexts but as mechanisms through which pre-existing Arabic repertoires are recognized, recontextualized, and activated. The article concludes by identifying boundary conditions and an empirical agenda for testing activation, transfer, and continuity beyond the first academic year.

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Keywords

arabic activation, arabic lives, relational language learning, islamic higher education, language repertoire, arabic education

INTRODUCTION

Arabic occupies a distinctive place in the lives of many Muslim learners who encounter the language long before they formally study it as an additional language. For non-Arab Muslims, Arabic may be repeatedly heard and produced through Qur'anic recitation, *salah*, supplications, *dhikr*, *ṣalawat*, religious instruction, and other devotional practices. Such experiences create a relationship with Arabic that cannot be adequately represented by formal proficiency levels alone. A learner may have limited conversational ability while possessing years of familiarity with Arabic sounds, expressions, texts, and ritual practices. Selim's concept of "Arabic Lives" is particularly relevant to this condition because it shifts attention from categorizing Arabic solely according to formal linguistic competence toward recognizing how Arabic is embedded in the religious, cultural, and lived experiences of Muslim learners.

This observation raises an important question for Arabic education: what should educators do with the Arabic that learners already possess? Conventional placement systems are valuable for identifying current proficiency, but they can inadvertently position incoming students primarily according to what they cannot yet do in Arabic. Such a perspective risks overlooking an important distinction between formal proficiency and experiential repertoire. For Muslim students entering Islamic higher education, Arabic may therefore be simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar: familiar through repeated religious exposure, yet unfamiliar as an intentionally understood and communicatively usable language. The educational challenge may consequently be less about introducing Arabic from a presumed zero point than about making an existing but uneven repertoire accessible for further development.

This distinction becomes particularly important when considering the difference between a formal beginner and an

experiential beginner. A student who is classified as A1 or as a beginner through a placement test may nevertheless recognize recurring Arabic expressions, understand fragments of ritual language, reproduce memorized formulas, or associate particular Arabic words with religious meanings and practices. Conversely, such familiarity should not be mistaken for comprehensive linguistic competence. Memorization is not comprehension, exposure is not proficiency, and religious familiarity is not communicative ability. The conceptual problem, therefore, lies in the space between what learners have encountered and what they can consciously access, understand, and use. It is this space that the present article conceptualizes as an activation gap.

The notion of activation has an established presence in language-learning scholarship, particularly in work emphasizing the movement between language knowledge and meaningful use across classroom and non-classroom contexts. Research on language activation highlights that linguistic resources become educationally consequential when learners have opportunities to mobilize them in authentic contexts rather than merely retain them as passive knowledge. However, the present argument concerns a more specific starting condition: pre-existing Arabic repertoires acquired through religious and lived experience. The issue is therefore not simply how learners activate newly taught language, but how education can deliberately activate Arabic that has already been repeatedly encountered, embodied, memorized, or partially understood before formal university instruction begins.

This problem also intersects with scholarship conceptualizing language development as socially and relationally situated. Language socialization, sociocultural approaches, interactionist perspectives, and communities-of-practice traditions have demonstrated that language development is shaped by participation with others rather than occurring solely as an individual cognitive process. Language is learned and used through interaction with teachers, peers, family members, communities, and institutions. This relational dimension is particularly significant for Muslim learners because Arabic is often encountered collectively: in prayer, religious instruction, recitation, communal practices, and peer interaction. Yet the relationship between lived Arabic experience, deliberate activation, and subsequent language development remains insufficiently integrated into a coherent developmental account for students entering Islamic higher education.

The resulting conceptual gap is therefore not the absence of scholarship on Arabic in Muslim lives, language activation, or relational language learning. Each of these areas has developed substantial bodies of literature. Rather, the gap lies in their limited theoretical integration. Existing scholarship helps explain where Arabic lives in Muslim learners' experiences and how language develops through interaction, but provides less guidance on how pre-existing religious Arabic repertoires can be deliberately activated as the starting mechanism of formal Arabic development. This article addresses that gap by proposing Arabic Activation as a developmental mechanism connecting lived Arabic experience with subsequent linguistic, interpersonal, and academic participation.

Indonesian Islamic higher education provides a productive context for rethinking the starting point of Arabic education. Students enter with heterogeneous Arabic histories, ranging from systematic study in madrasah or *pesantren* to primarily Qur'anic and ritual exposure. This heterogeneity is also evident at UIN Malang, where Hilmi et al (2024) found varied linguistic profiles among 264 students. Yet existing Arabic experience does not automatically become an active learning resource. The first-year *Ma'had* therefore offers a distinctive ecology for conceptualizing Arabic Activation. Earlier work identified Arabic *Ibadi* in *salah* as a potentially foundational repertoire for Arabic learning across levels (Amiruddin, 2024), but did not explain how such lived Arabic could be relationally activated and progressively expanded.

Accordingly, this article addresses three questions: (1) How can Arabic already embedded in Muslim learners' religious lives be reconceptualized as a starting point for Arabic education? (2) Through what pedagogical and relational mechanisms can such a repertoire be transformed from familiarity into meaningful linguistic use? and (3) How can activation support a developmental progression from lived Arabic to academic and eventually program-specific Arabic? We argue that the contribution of this article is not to claim that Arabic already exists in Muslim learners' lives or that language learning is relational; both propositions are established. Rather, we propose Arabic Activation as a missing developmental mechanism linking these insights: Arabic Lives → Arabic Activation → Live Arabic → Academic Arabic → Program-Specific Arabic. This framework reimagines the starting point of Arabic education

in Islamic higher education and generates theoretical propositions that can subsequently be tested through longitudinal empirical research.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Arabic Lives: Beyond Formal Proficiency

The conceptual starting point of this article is the recognition that Arabic may occupy a substantial place in Muslim learners' lives without corresponding to formally measured proficiency. Selim (2019) proposes "Arabic Lives" to foreground the religious, cultural, and multifaceted affiliations that non-Arab Muslim learners may have with Arabic. Such affiliation may emerge through religious practices and institutions rather than ethnicity, family transmission, or community heritage. In the Indonesian Islamic higher education context, Nurhadi *et al.* (2023) further shows how Arabic linguistic identity is embedded in the religious life of students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Malang. Arabic may therefore be meaningful and encountered repeatedly before it is formally mastered.

This perspective distinguishes Arabic as formally proficient from Arabic as experientially encountered. Muslim learners may repeatedly encounter Arabic through Qur'anic recitation, *salah*, supplication, *dhikr*, and religious instruction while lacking spontaneous discourse. Amiruddin (2014) demonstrated that familiar *salah* recitations can serve as a starting point for accelerating Arabic learning among heterogeneous first-year students. Thus, religiously embedded Arabic may constitute an initial learning resource without implying communicative proficiency. Arabic Lives occupies this intermediate space: Arabic is present, meaningful, and repeatedly experienced, yet its resources may remain unevenly understood and insufficiently mobilized. It therefore shifts attention from what learners need to acquire toward what they already encounter and can potentially activate.

From Language Learning to Arabic Activation

The second foundation concerns activation. Choi & Nunan (2018) emphasize the dynamic relationship between language learning and language use, challenging a rigid separation between classroom learning

and subsequent real-world use. Learning and activation can occur simultaneously as learners develop and mobilize linguistic resources through meaningful activity.

The present framework extends this proposition to a different starting condition: rather than asking how learners activate language after formally learning it, it asks how educators can activate Arabic that learners have already encountered through religious and everyday experience. This distinction yields three conditions:

exposure ≠ familiarity ≠ activation.

Exposure involves encountering Arabic; familiarity involves recognition and repeated association; activation involves making linguistic resources consciously accessible, meaningful, and purposeful for use. A memorized *salah* formula, for example, becomes activated when learners attend to its meaning, linguistic structure, interpersonal possibilities, and potential transfer to new contexts.

Accordingly, Arabic Activation refers to the pedagogical process through which Arabic repertoires embedded in learners' lived experiences become consciously accessible, semantically meaningful, linguistically analyzable, and progressively usable in new contexts. It does not simply increase exposure or require immediate speaking; rather, familiar prayers, expressions, vocabulary, and devotional texts become bridges toward comprehension, linguistic awareness, interaction, and subsequent formal development.

Relationally Situated Language Learning

Activation is not exclusively an individual process but is shaped through interaction and participation. Language socialization research emphasizes multiparty participation and culturally situated learning (De León & García-Sánchez, 2021). This is particularly relevant to Arabic, which is often encountered through teachers, peers, religious communities, and shared practices. Contextual studies in Indonesian Islamic education likewise show the value of moving beyond classroom instruction toward language environments and everyday interaction (Hamid & Fatimah, 2020; Sholeh & Mufidah, 2022; Husna, Inayah, Mubarak, Taufiqurrahaman, & Qomariah, 2022). These studies establish the value of Arabic around learners' lived environments; the present

framework extends this orientation to Arabic within learners' lives, where existing repertoires become resources for activation.

Integrating Arabic Lives, Activation, and Relationality

These perspectives address complementary dimensions of language development. **Arabic Lives** explains where Arabic begins: within learners' religious, cultural, and experiential histories. **Activation** explains how existing resources become consciously mobilized. **Relationally situated learning** explains how that mobilization is sustained through interaction and participation.

Their integration yields the central theoretical proposition of this article. Existing scholarship establishes the lived significance of Arabic for non-Arab Muslims, the dynamic relationship between learning and activation, and the relational nature of language development. What remains insufficiently theorized is the **developmental mechanism connecting these domains in Islamic higher education**. We therefore conceptualize **Arabic Activation** as that connecting mechanism: a repertoire-sensitive process transforming existing familiarity into conscious meaning, interpersonal participation, and progressively broader linguistic use. The resulting developmental logic is:

Arabic Lives → Arabic Activation → Relational Participation → Live Arabic → Academic Arabic → Program-Specific Arabic

This sequence is developmental rather than strictly linear. Its central implication is that Arabic education need not always begin by introducing Arabic; it can begin by awakening, organizing, deepening, and extending the Arabic learners already carry.

CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS AND THEORY-BUILDING APPROACH

This article adopts a critical conceptual synthesis and theory-building approach rather than an empirical research design. It integrates insights from partially disconnected literatures to develop a conceptual explanation of how existing Arabic repertoires may be activated through relational learning. The aim is therefore not to estimate effects or test a predetermined model, but to identify relationships among constructs that have previously been examined separately.

The synthesis was organized around three theoretically distinct

but potentially complementary domains: Arabic Lives, language activation, and relationally situated language learning. The first domain establishes the experiential starting condition. Selim (2019) formulation of Arabic Lives identifies the religious, cultural, and lived significance of Arabic for non-Arab Muslims beyond conventional heritage-language and proficiency categories. The second domain provides the developmental mechanism. Drawing on Choi & Nunan (2018) dynamic understanding of language activation, the analysis considers how previously encountered linguistic resources can move from familiarity or passive knowledge toward conscious and meaningful use. The third domain provides the social mechanism, drawing on language socialization and interaction-oriented scholarship to conceptualize language development as situated within participation, relationships, and institutional contexts.

The synthesis followed four analytical operations. First, construct extraction identified the definitions, assumptions, and boundary conditions associated with each literature stream. Second, conceptual comparison examined where the constructs converged, differed, or left explanatory gaps. Third, relational integration asked how the three domains could be linked without collapsing their theoretical distinctions. Fourth, generative theorizing translated the resulting relationships into a developmental framework and explicit propositions. This logic follows contemporary approaches to theory-driven integrative synthesis, in which literature is not merely summarized but critically reorganized to generate a more explanatory conceptual structure.

The analysis therefore distinguishes between existing constructs and the new conceptual relationship proposed in this article. Arabic Lives is treated as an established conceptual foundation rather than a novel term. Likewise, activation and relational language learning are treated as established theoretical territories. The proposed contribution lies in integrating them around a specific developmental problem: Muslim learners may enter Islamic higher education with substantial but uneven Arabic experience that has not yet been systematically converted into linguistic and communicative resources. We therefore introduce Arabic Activation as a conceptual mechanism that connects pre-existing Arabic repertoires with subsequent relational participation, lived language use, and academic development.

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The resulting framework is consequently not presented as a validated causal model. Rather, it is a propositional theory-building framework intended to clarify mechanisms, establish conceptual boundaries, and generate empirically testable propositions. Its central developmental logic is:

Arabic Lives → Arabic Activation → Relational Participation → Live Arabic → Academic Arabic → Program-Specific Arabic

The framework thus provides a theoretical starting point for future longitudinal and mixed-methods research that can examine whether the proposed relationships hold across different institutional, linguistic, and educational contexts.

FROM ARABIC LIVES TO ARABIC ACTIVATION

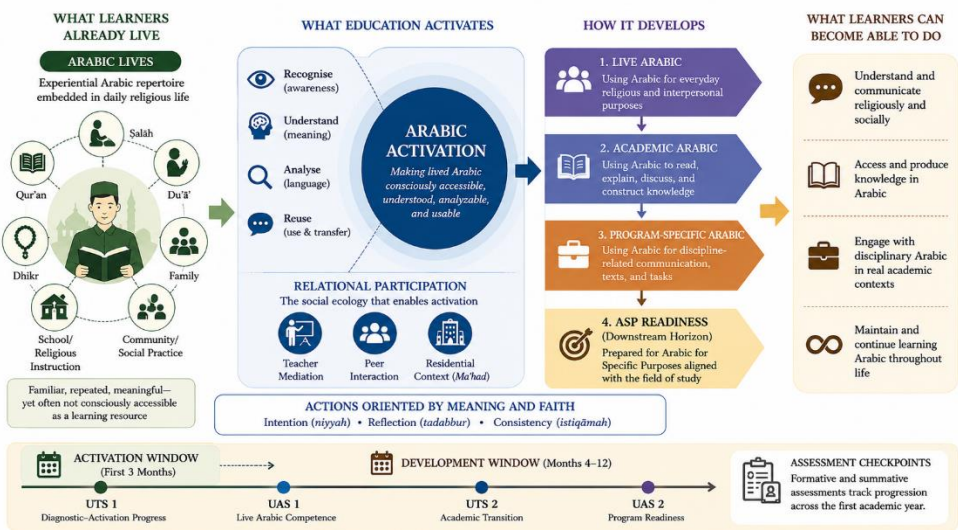
The central conceptual problem addressed in this article is the meaning of a starting point in Arabic education for Muslim learners. Conventional placement approaches appropriately establish learners' current proficiency, yet proficiency does not necessarily exhaust the Arabic resources that students bring to higher education. For many non-Arab Muslims, Arabic has already been encountered through *ṣalah*, Qur'anic recitation, supplication, *dhikr*, religious schooling, greetings, and recurring family and community practices. Selim (2019) challenges the adequacy of conventional heritage-language categorization for such learners and proposes Arabic Lives to foreground their religious and multifaceted affiliation with Arabic.

This perspective suggests a distinction between formal

proficiency and experiential repertoire. A student may perform at a beginner level in a placement test while recognizing substantial amounts of Arabic encountered repeatedly in religious life. Such familiarity should not be equated with proficiency; rather, it constitutes a potential resource for further learning. Research on non-Arab Muslim learners likewise indicates that religious orientations can shape their motivation and engagement with Arabic (Selim & Abdalla, 2022).

Figure 1

From Arabic Lives to Arabic Activation: Reimagining the Starting Point



From Formal Beginner to Experiential Repertoire

The distinction between a formal beginner and an experiential beginner is therefore theoretically consequential. A formal beginner demonstrates limited proficiency in observable language tasks; an experiential beginner has had relatively little meaningful contact with the language. Among Muslim learners, these conditions may diverge. Students may be unable to sustain an Arabic conversation while simultaneously recognizing expressions encountered for years in ritual and religious contexts.

Research on Qur'anic Arabic illustrates this distinction. Rosowsky

(2023) shows that sacred-language learning may prioritize accurate performance and access to a religious code, with linguistic form and ritual participation sometimes preceding referential meaning. The educational implication is not that ritual memorization constitutes communicative competence, but that it can provide a linguistic reservoir from which meaning, structure, and transferable use can subsequently be developed.

Proposition 1. Formal beginner status does not necessarily correspond to the absence of prior Arabic experience; Muslim learners may enter higher education with uneven experiential Arabic repertoires that precede formally demonstrated proficiency.

This proposition reframes the entry point from a deficit-only question—*What does the learner lack?* —toward a repertoire-sensitive question: *What Arabic has the learner already encountered, what is recognizable, and what can potentially be activated*?

From Presence to Activation

Recognition of a repertoire, however, does not make it educationally productive by itself. The second conceptual move is activation. Choi & Nunan (2018) explicitly prefer activation to the narrower term use because it conveys a more dynamic relationship between learning and language activity. They argue that learning and activation can occur both within and beyond classrooms and that learners can develop communicative resources through such activation.

Building on this insight, we define Arabic Activation as the pedagogical process through which Arabic already embedded in learners' lived experiences becomes consciously accessible, meaningful, analyzable, and progressively usable in new contexts. The distinction can be represented as:

exposure → familiarity → understanding → activation

Exposure means encountering Arabic. Familiarity reflects repeated recognition or association with particular forms and situations. Understanding provides access to meaning and structure. Activation occurs when that repertoire can be deliberately mobilized for interpretation, interaction, and transfer.

Thus, a memorized expression from *salah* need not remain a fixed ritual formula. It can become an entry point for vocabulary, morphology,

syntax, semantics, pronunciation, and communicative practice. Activation does not reject memorization; it releases linguistic potential from memorized forms.

Proposition 2. Deliberate activation of pre-existing Arabic repertoires can transform experiential or ritual familiarity into a resource for linguistic and communicative development when learners move from recognition and meaning toward purposeful use.

This conceptualization also differentiates activation from simply increasing exposure. The central question is whether learners can mobilize what they already encounter.

Activation as Relationally Situated Learning

Arabic activation should not be understood solely as an individual cognitive process. Language socialization research positions language development within socially organized, culturally situated interaction (Duff & Talmy, 2011), while more recent work highlights multimodal and interactional ecologies in which communicative competence develops (De León & García-Sánchez, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant to Arabic Lives because learners' prior Arabic is often relationally mediated through parents, teachers, religious instructors, peers, and communities. Activation occurs when familiar expressions are explained, interpreted, reused, and extended through meaningful interaction.

Residential language environments can further connect input, interaction, and output beyond scheduled instruction. Research on Arabic language environments confirms the complementary roles of formal and informal settings in providing opportunities for input, interaction, and learner output (Muttaqin, Bakheit, & Hasanah, 2024).

Accordingly, the present framework conceptualizes activation as:

existing repertoire + meaningful interaction + pedagogical mediation → activated repertoire (1)

Proposition 3. The transformation of pre-existing Arabic repertoire into active language competence is facilitated when activation is embedded in repeated, meaningful interpersonal participation

supported by teachers, peers, and relevant learning communities.

Relationality is therefore not an automatic outcome of interaction. Its significance lies in opportunities for explanation, negotiation, feedback, repetition, and transfer.

From Activated Repertoire to Functional Expansion

The theoretical value of activation ultimately lies in what it enables after activation. The proposed developmental logic is:

Arabic Lives → Arabic Activation → Live Arabic → Academic Arabic → Program-Specific Arabic (2)

The first transition is from familiar Arabic to Live Arabic, allowing learners to use activated resources in everyday interpersonal communication. The second extends these resources into Academic Arabic, where learners read, explain, discuss, present, and construct knowledge. The final transition opens the pathway toward Program-Specific Arabic, where Arabic becomes increasingly connected to disciplinary terminology, genres, and communicative purposes.

This sequence resonates with the CEFR Companion Volume's action-oriented view of learners as social agents who combine reception, production, interaction, and mediation, while recognizing plurilingual resources as part of language development (Little, 2016; Council of Europe, 2018). It also aligns with the broader understanding that language learning can extend across formal and informal environments rather than being confined to classroom instruction (Reinders & Benson, 2017).

Proposition 4. Activation becomes developmentally consequential when activated resources expand into interpersonal and academic functions before substantial specialization in program-specific Arabic is introduced.

Accordingly, ASP is positioned as a developmental horizon rather than a starting point. Specialization builds upon an activated repertoire instead of replacing foundational development.

Activation as a Foundation for Continuity

Finally, Arabic Activation should not be presented as a short intervention whose effects automatically become lifelong. Its theoretical function is to establish a durable starting orientation toward Arabic. The learner moves from *"I have memorized this"* toward *"I recognize it, understand it, can use it, and can continue learning from it."*

The distinction is therefore:

short-term activation ≠ lifelong effect

but:

short-term activation → durable foundation → continued development. (3)

This position is consistent with research emphasizing learning across classroom and out-of-class environments and the dynamic nature of language activation (Choi & Nunan, 2018; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

Proposition 5. A strategically designed Arabic Activation phase is more appropriately conceptualized as a foundation for sustained language development than as a self-contained intervention with assumed lifelong effects.

Taken together, these propositions establish the article's central theoretical architecture: Arabic Lives identifies the experiential starting condition; Arabic Activation specifies the developmental mechanism; relational participation provides the social conditions; and functional expansion explains how activated resources can move toward lived, academic, and eventually program-specific Arabic.

The central claim is therefore not that Muslim learners already "know Arabic" in any simple sense. Rather, Arabic may already be present in their lived experience, and education can transform that presence into an active linguistic resource. The starting point of Arabic education consequently shifts from asking only what learners lack toward asking what Arabic they already carry, how it can be activated, and how that activated repertoire can support what they subsequently live, learn, and become able to do through Arabic.

THE ARABIC ACTIVATION DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAY

Arabic Activation becomes educationally meaningful when

positioned within a developmental pathway rather than treated as a short-term instructional intervention. The proposed pathway responds to a common condition in Islamic higher education: students enter with heterogeneous levels of formal Arabic proficiency while carrying varying degrees of prior Arabic experience acquired through religious, educational, and everyday practices. The framework therefore distinguishes between the activation window and the broader developmental window. The first three months constitute the activation window, whereas the first academic year provides the developmental window in which activated Arabic can progressively become lived, academic, and program-oriented language.

The pathway consists of four interconnected stages:

Arabic Activation → Live Arabic → Academic Arabic → Program-Specific Arabic (4)

These stages represent changing functions of Arabic, rather than fixed proficiency levels or four separate courses. Progression is therefore cumulative rather than linear: later stages expand the contexts in which previously activated resources can be used.

Arabic Activation: The First Three Months

The first stage establishes the learner's new starting point. Instead of treating incoming students as linguistically blank beginners, Arabic education begins by identifying and activating the repertoire they already possess. This may include Arabic encountered through *ṣalah*, Qur'anic recitation, supplications, *dhikr*, religious instruction, greetings, and other recurring practices.

The three months are therefore conceptualized as an Arabic Activation Window, not as a complete Arabic course. Its purpose is to transform familiarity into conscious linguistic access through a progression of:

recognition → comprehension → linguistic awareness → meaningful use. (5)

Familiar ritual expressions can become entry points for

vocabulary development, morphological and syntactic awareness, interpretation, and simple productive use. Memorization is not discarded; rather, it becomes a reservoir from which deeper linguistic access can be developed.

The first formal checkpoint, UTS Semester 1, can examine whether previously familiar Arabic has begun to become consciously accessible through semantic understanding, lexical recognition, and initial purposeful use.

Live Arabic: From Activated Repertoire to Participation

Once Arabic becomes consciously accessible, the second stage moves from repertoire to lived interaction. The central transformation is:

Arabic as remembered → Arabic as used. (6)

Live Arabic refers to the progressive use of activated resources in everyday and interpersonal situations: greetings, requests, descriptions, questions, responses, routines, campus activities, and peer interaction. The objective is not to impose an artificial Arabic-only environment, but to increase the availability of Arabic as a meaningful communicative resource.

This stage is particularly compatible with residential Islamic higher education because students repeatedly encounter the same peers, teachers, routines, and institutional activities. Such continuity creates opportunities for relational recycling, in which vocabulary and expressions encountered in one context reappear in others and gradually acquire broader functions.

The UAS Semester 1 therefore serves as a second developmental checkpoint. It can examine whether activated Arabic has begun to move beyond ritual recognition toward functional comprehension, interpersonal participation, and basic productive use.

Academic Arabic: From Participation to Learning

The third stage expands Arabic from interpersonal

communication into a medium for learning. The transition is:

Arabic for interaction → Arabic for academic participation. (7)

Students progressively use Arabic to read, identify main ideas, summarize information, explain concepts, ask questions, discuss issues, present arguments, and produce structured written responses. The purpose is not to replace Live Arabic but to extend the repertoire into more cognitively and linguistically demanding discourse.

This stage is important because it changes the learner's relationship with Arabic from an object of study into a resource for knowledge construction. Familiar vocabulary may acquire broader semantic meanings, while previously activated grammatical patterns can be extended into academic discourse.

The UTS Semester 2 functions as the third checkpoint, assessing the extent to which students can mobilize their developing Arabic repertoire for academic reading, explanation, discussion, presentation, and controlled writing.

Program-Specific Arabic: Toward Disciplinary Relevance

The fourth stage introduces progressive differentiation according to students' academic fields. Program-Specific Arabic refers to Arabic adapted to the terminology, genres, communicative practices, and knowledge structures of a particular Program Studi. At this stage, the developmental pathway begins to converge with Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP).

ASP, however, is deliberately positioned as a downstream destination rather than the starting point. Disciplinary specialization becomes more meaningful when learners have first developed an activated repertoire, interpersonal functionality, and academic language capacity. A student of Islamic banking, pharmacy, psychology, education, law, or another field can then extend an established Arabic foundation into discipline-related terminology and discourse rather than encountering specialization before possessing the linguistic resources needed to benefit from it.

The UAS Semester 2 serves as the fourth checkpoint. Its purpose is not to claim full ASP competence, but to examine emerging disciplinary transfer: recognition of introductory field-related terminology,

comprehension of accessible discipline-specific texts, and the ability to explain selected concepts using the developing Arabic repertoire.

One-Year Developmental Architecture

The four stages are best understood as a one-year developmental architecture:

Tabel 1

Developmental Pathway of Arabic Activation and Interpersonal Learning

Developmental stage	Main period	Central transformation	Developmental checkpoint
1. Arabic Activation	First 3 months	Familiarity → conscious repertoire	UTS 1
2. Live Arabic	Remainder of Semester 1	Repertoire → interpersonal participation	UAS 1
3. Academic Arabic	Semester 2	Participation → academic discourse	UTS 2
4. Program-Specific Arabic	Toward the end of Semester 2	Academic capacity → disciplinary transfer	UAS 2

Thus, the three-month activation window is embedded within a one-year developmental window, monitored through four assessment checkpoints. The examinations should not be conceptualized merely as administrative evaluations; they can function as evidence points for examining whether Arabic is moving from familiarity to activation, from activation to interaction, and from interaction to academic and disciplinary use.

The pathway also establishes an important boundary around claims of long-term impact. Three months cannot reasonably be presented as producing lifelong proficiency or religious transformation. Rather, the proposed purpose of the activation phase is to establish a durable starting orientation: students begin to recognize Arabic as something already present in their lives, understand more of what they encounter, use it with others, and continue developing it beyond the initial activation period.

Accordingly, the developmental sequence is not:
three months → completion
but:

three-month activation → one-year development → continued learning. (8)

The long-term horizon is therefore lifelong Arabic and religious literacy, while Program-Specific Arabic represents one later direction of development. The central contribution of the pathway is to reposition the beginning of Arabic education: rather than asking only how much Arabic students know when they arrive, it asks what Arabic they already live with, how it can be activated, and how that activated repertoire can progressively support the ways they live, learn, and specialize through Arabic.

THE THREE-MONTH ACTIVATION FOUNDATION AND LONGITUDINAL LOGIC

The developmental pathway proposed above requires a temporal architecture that distinguishes the duration of initial activation from the duration of subsequent language development. We therefore conceptualize the first three months as an Arabic Activation Foundation and the first academic year as the broader developmental window. In the context of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, this distinction is institutionally meaningful because undergraduate students reside in *Ma'had* during their first academic year, encompassing Semesters 1 and 2. The residential environment creates sustained opportunities for formal instruction, religious practice, peer interaction, and language use to intersect (Malang, 2021).

The Three-Month Activation Foundation

The first three months are not intended to complete Arabic learning or to produce advanced proficiency. Their purpose is to establish a repertoire-sensitive starting point. Students first identify Arabic that is already familiar from prayer, Qur'anic recitation, supplication, *dhikr*, and everyday religious experience. This material is

then progressively connected to meaning, lexical structure, grammatical patterns, contextual use, and simple productive activities.

The developmental logic can be summarized as:

recognize → understand → analyze → use → transfer. (9)

The desired outcome is therefore not merely additional memorization but a changed relationship with familiar Arabic: students begin to recognize it as a linguistic resource that can be understood, discussed, and extended beyond its original contexts. The foundation is consequently designed to support durable learning dispositions, particularly semantic curiosity, linguistic awareness, meaningful use, and willingness to continue learning after the initial activation period.

A Five-Point Longitudinal Logic

The one-year developmental window is monitored through five points:

T0 — Placement Test.

T0 establishes the learner's baseline by identifying both formal proficiency and pre-existing Arabic experience. This distinction is essential because the framework assumes that formal proficiency and experiential repertoire do not necessarily coincide.

T1 — UTS Semester 1.

T1 represents an early activation checkpoint. The central question is whether previously familiar Arabic has begun to move toward conscious recognition and semantic understanding.

T2 — UAS Semester 1.

T2 examines activation consolidation and movement toward Live Arabic. Evidence may include comprehension, vocabulary growth, interactional ability, and the transfer of familiar Arabic into everyday contexts.

T3 — UTS Semester 2.

T3 represents the transition toward Academic Arabic. The relevant question is whether increasingly activated and lived Arabic can support reading, explanation, discussion, presentation, and other

academic practices.

T4 — UAS Semester 2.

T4 marks the end of the first-year developmental cycle. It examines sustained development and emerging disciplinary readiness, rather than assuming full mastery of program-specific Arabic.

The resulting logic is:

T0 → Activation → T1 → Consolidation → T2 → Academic Transfer → T3 → Emerging Specialization → T4 (10)

The model therefore treats assessment as developmental evidence, not merely summative judgment. UTS and UAS remain institutional examinations, but within this framework they also provide recurring opportunities to examine whether activated Arabic is being retained, extended, and transferred across increasingly complex contexts.

From Activation Window to Lifelong Continuity

The framework makes no claim that three months automatically produce lifelong effects. Instead, the three-month foundation is hypothesized to establish a launching condition for continued learning. The long-term educational aspiration is continuity: students leave the residential environment not with "completed Arabic," but with a more conscious repertoire, greater capacity to activate new language, and a stronger basis for continued linguistic development.

Thus:

Three months initiate activation; one year develops the pathway; continued learning carries it forward.

This temporal distinction provides a cautious but constructive basis for future longitudinal research examining the durability and transfer of Arabic Activation beyond the first academic year.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS, BOUNDARY CONDITIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The conceptual framework developed in this article makes three

principal contributions to scholarship on Arabic education and relational language learning.

First, it reconceptualizes the starting point of Arabic education for Muslim learners. Rather than assuming that formal beginner status represents the absence of prior Arabic experience, the framework distinguishes between formal proficiency and experiential Arabic repertoire. This distinction extends the implications of *Arabic Lives* by asking not only where Arabic is situated in learners' lives, but also what educational mechanisms can make that repertoire developmentally productive (Selim, 2019). The contribution is therefore a shift from a primarily deficit-oriented starting point toward a repertoire-sensitive starting point.

Second, the framework contributes the concept of Arabic Activation as a developmental mechanism. The construct extends existing work on language activation by specifying a distinctive initial condition: the language being activated may already be embedded in learners' religious and lived experiences rather than newly introduced through formal instruction (Choi & Nunan, 2018). Arabic Activation consequently connects prior familiarity with semantic access, linguistic awareness, interpersonal participation, and transfer to new communicative contexts. Its theoretical value lies not in introducing "activation" as an entirely new idea, but in specifying a previously underdeveloped relationship between lived religious repertoire and formal language development.

Third, the framework contributes a developmental and relational architecture linking Arabic Activation, Live Arabic, Academic Arabic, and Program-Specific Arabic. This sequence adds a temporal dimension to relationally situated language learning by proposing that activated repertoires may progressively expand across different functional contexts. It also positions interpersonal participation as a facilitating mechanism rather than a peripheral contextual variable. In this respect, the framework provides a conceptual bridge between lived language experience, relational participation, and increasingly formal academic purposes.

Boundary Conditions and Limitations

The framework should nevertheless be interpreted within several boundaries. First, the existence and strength of pre-existing Arabic repertoires will vary substantially among learners. Religious practice does not produce uniform linguistic competence, and the model does not assume that all Muslim students share identical Arabic experiences. Second, Arabic Activation should not be equated with improved faith, *khushu`*, *tawḥīd* consciousness, or spiritual fulfillment. Such outcomes belong to a normative religious horizon and require different forms of theological and empirical inquiry. The framework therefore makes a pedagogical claim about meaningful access to language, not a causal claim about spiritual transformation.

Third, the proposed three-month Activation Foundation is conceptualized as a starting condition rather than a complete intervention. Its long-term effects cannot be assumed from its duration. Durability, transfer, and lifelong continuation remain empirical questions. Fourth, the framework has been developed with the residential first-year context of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang as an analytically informative setting. Its transferability to non-residential institutions, different national contexts, or learners with substantially different religious and linguistic histories requires empirical examination.

Future Empirical Research Agenda

The framework generates a clear research agenda. Future studies should first validate the proposed distinction between formal proficiency and experiential Arabic repertoire through placement instruments capable of assessing both dimensions. Second, longitudinal mixed-methods studies can examine change across T0, UTS1, UAS1, UTS2, and UAS2, testing whether early activation is associated with later development in Live and Academic Arabic. Third, experimental or quasi-experimental research can compare repertoire-sensitive activation with conventional beginner-oriented instruction. Fourth, qualitative studies can examine how teachers, peers, family members, and residential communities mediate the transition from familiar ritual Arabic to meaningful interpersonal use. Finally, delayed post-tests after students leave the residential environment can examine whether the proposed activation foundation produces durable learning dispositions and

continued self-directed Arabic learning.

Together, these directions allow the framework to move from conceptual proposition to empirical scrutiny. The central question for future research is therefore not simply whether students learn more Arabic, but whether activating Arabic that already lives within them provides a more effective and meaningful starting point for sustained language development.

CONCLUSION

This article has reconsidered what it means to begin Arabic education in Islamic higher education. For many Muslim learners, the beginning of formal Arabic education is not necessarily a linguistic zero point. Arabic may already be embedded in their lived religious experiences through *salah*, Qur'anic recitation, supplication, *dhikr*, religious instruction, and recurring social practices. Yet the presence of Arabic does not automatically constitute linguistic competence. Building on Arabic Lives, language activation, and relationally situated learning, this article conceptualizes Arabic Activation as a mechanism through which pre-existing Arabic repertoires can become consciously accessible, semantically meaningful, relationally usable, and transferable across contexts.

The resulting framework proposes a developmental pathway from Arabic Activation → Live Arabic → Academic Arabic → Program-Specific Arabic within the first-year residential environment of Islamic higher education. The first three months constitute an Activation Foundation, while the full first academic year provides a developmental window in which activated repertoires can progressively support interpersonal participation, academic learning, and emerging disciplinary purposes. The longitudinal architecture T0 → UTS1 → UAS1 → UTS2 → UAS2 further provides a structure through which future research can examine activation, consolidation, transfer, and continuity over time. Importantly, these assessment points are proposed as opportunities for empirical investigation, not as evidence that the framework has already demonstrated developmental effects.

The central theoretical contribution is therefore a shift from a predominantly deficit-oriented conception of the beginning Arabic

learner toward a repertoire-sensitive and relationally situated starting point. The key question is not only how much Arabic a student can demonstrate at entry, but also what Arabic already lives within that student and how relationships can help activate it. Three months cannot be assumed to produce lifelong proficiency or spiritual transformation; rather, they may establish conditions for continued engagement with Arabic. Arabic Activation is consequently proposed not as an endpoint, but as a developmental starting mechanism through which lived Arabic can become relationally usable, academically productive, and eventually responsive to program-specific purposes.

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