Research Article

Student’s perceptions of Arabic online learning during COVID-19 emergency

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Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) creates challenges for Arabic learning at Indonesian Islamic Colleges. The limitations of the language learning process during the pandemic caused various problems. In addition, using learning strategies requires special planning related to differences in face-to-face learning processes into learning with online systems. Arabic is a compulsory subject that helps students acquire communication skills in a foreign language. This research describes students’ perceptions of Arabic online learning at a public Islamic college in Malang. It also examines the strategies for learning during the COVID-19 emergency. The study uses a qualitative approach for data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. Research samples were taken from students in semester 2⁴ to semester 6⁸ with varying abilities. The data analysis is carried out using triangulation techniques in several steps, and involves collection, reduction, and conclusion. The results showed that students perceive Arabic online learning to be less effective. Some factors that do not support online learning such as the lack of instructions given by lecturers, limited internet connection, lack of internal motivation of students, lack of discussion hours. Several strategies are used, including discussions, lectures, singing, presentations, studying literature, and writing. The use of Arabic learning resources in online media illustrates the process of independent learning for students. The results provide input for integrating all components of learning holistically and variedly for students to remain motivated irrespective of the condition. This study recommends other researchers to examine and improve what skills teachers need to have when learning online and efforts to increase student interest in the language learning process with an online system.

To cite this article:

Introduction

Although Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, is endemic in Indonesia, it has threatened lives throughout the world (Marinoni et al. 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), COVID-19 has influenced the Indonesian and global education sectors (Djalante et al. 2020). In Indonesia, the government issued and provided several policies regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. One of them is the prohibition of people gathering and doing activities outside the home, and advocating to stay at home (Zahara & Krilova, 2020; Abidah et al. 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant changes in the learning system in Indonesia, including foreign languages. For instance, Arabic learning is usually held in the classroom in a structured system with prepared material and support structures such as adequate facilities and infrastructure. However, online learning has been adopted due to COVID-19. Although the objectives remain the same, the entire system has changed (Richardson et al. 2016). Technology has increased the language expressing options (Chun et al. 2016).

To reduce the negative impact of COVID-19, the Indonesian Government has implemented a learning system through online media. This condition changes the learning process to keep students active. For instance, students

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should think critically, actively, and creatively due to lecturers’ limitations in giving instructions. Online learning is not a new concept in education because it was introduced years back (Slim & Hafedh, 2019). The introduction of online learning was in line with 21st-century demands, including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills (Rusdin, 2018).

The UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri) Maulana Malik Ibrahim has implemented a learning process using online media in every subject. This move has been emphasized even more due to the COVID-19 emergency. Studies examine the students’ perceptions of Arabic online learning and identify the strategies used. This is because the students’ psychological conditions, the motivation, the learning environment, and their perceptions determine success (Guo, 2018; Saptenno et al. 2019; Fong et al. 2017; Mahmudi et al. 2019; Islam et al. 2019). Similarly, the use of different strategies may facilitate achieving set goals (Barnabas et al. 2019).

Arabic learning based on online media offered flexibility and convenience for students. However, it was less effective when lecturers gave instructions regarding the material to be discussed (Brown, 2009). Lack of interaction in online classes can create psychological distance and feelings of isolation and broken relationships, especially to those not accustomed to online learning (Olmanson & Liu, 2018). However, another study showed that the instructor's role is the main element in keeping students active (Hart, 2012). Therefore, the interaction between lecturers and students is vital in facilitating online learning.

Previous studies showed that learning foreign languages online has positive impacts, including increased student interaction, collaborative relationships, linguistic participation, equitable opportunities, and increased creativity and student achievements (Bowers & Kumar, 2015; Peeters, 2018; Lin et al. 2016; Moeller & Abbott, 2018; Febriani et al. 2020; Mellati & Khademi, 2015).

**Problem of Study**
All the objects of previous works were Arabic students. There is a need for fundamental studies on students’ perceptions of online Arabic learning during the COVID-19 emergency and strategies. Therefore, the questions of this study are follows:

- How university students’ (enrolled in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang) perceptions of online learning in the COVID-19 emergency?
- What strategies are used by lecturers (worked in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang) in learning Arabic with an online system?

**Method**

**Research Method**
This study utilized a descriptive qualitative approach through a case study. Qualitative research examined students' perceptions and analyzed the strategy in Arabic teaching based on the holistic experience of the subjects. This is based on the description of words and language in a specific natural context with various scientific methods (Moleong, 2007).

The case study method focused on the students' perceptions and Arabic learning activities (Yin, 2003). The data from research subjects were comprehensively scrutinized. The case study research was chosen because of the need to explain and reveal the overall and comprehensive students' perceptions in online Arabic learning at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia. There was something unique to learn from students' perceptions and strategies used during the COVID-19 emergency. The phenomenon could be explored and interpreted as a unified and comprehensive unit in each Arabic learning and strategy used.

**Participants**
The participants came from Arabic students and lecturers at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The researchers took random participants from semester 2 to semester 6 in the Arabic education department. Sampling consisted with different classifications of students, 4 students in 6th semester and 4 students in 2nd semester.

**Data Collection**
The data collection techniques used include interviews, observation, and documentation. The Arabic language teachers, two groups of 4 students each in the 6th and 2nd semester with high and low ability in Arabic during 2019/2020, were interviewed. Random sampling techniques were used, where each individual had the same chance of being selected as an informant. A random sample to collect data about students' perceptions of learning Arabic online was selected. Furthermore, the observation was used to gather information on language environment and
classroom. Documentation was used to collect information about classroom administration and the learning process from the lesson plans and academic guidance books.

This research uses ten question topics and is developed into 40 items (Appendix 1) for interviews with students. In addition, researchers also interviewed teachers to take whatever strategies are used in learning Arabic using an online system.

The interview aims to explore information related to students' perceptions in learning Arabic using an online system. The questions posed were 40 questions on various topics, such as student responses in the online learning process and the teacher's strategy in learning Arabic online.

Data triangulation is one way to check the validity of the data by using factors or something outside the data itself to check the data. All of the research instruments have adequate validity and reliability as measurement tools in research. The researcher uses this method to compare existing data and when he discovers differences between collected data and documents and observation guidelines (Yin, 2003).

Data analysis
The analysis techniques used were based on triangulation data, where they were collected and described, reduced, and verified. Data collection was carried out in early May to June. The data was then reduced by selecting and sorting the details that support the research.

The researcher uses the following steps in the process of analyzing data:

Through the figure 1, several steps in analyzing the data are described as follows;

- Data collection. The researchers collected data from the observation, as the researchers notes the existing activities related to students' perception and using strategies for Arabic learning based on online system in UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. As for the information from the documents, the researchers collect it through lesson plan about teaching the Arabic language in online learning.
- Data classification. In the data classification, the researchers reduced the data related to the case and classified it as encoding. In classifying data, the researchers focused on data related to students' perceptions and the strategies in teaching Arabic based on online system.
- Display data. The step in which the data is reduced is the data display. Data presentation is the process of presenting and processing it, which includes: the process of identification, classification and organization, and explanation methodically, objectively, and comprehensively, and finally comes the interpretation.
- Conclusion. The last step is to take deduction. In this step, the researchers concluded the research findings according to the researcher's classifications and according to his interpretations.

Results
Student Perceptions about Online Learning during COVID-19
The Arabic learning at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang during the COVID-19 emergency is oriented to online learning, which is student-centered. It begins with the provision of material by the lecturers. Afterward, then students carry out activities independently and explore the material on social media. One of the efforts to be done is active
language competency to improve the ability of students to speak Arabic even in an emergency COVID-19. In his interview, Ik articulated the following:

Language competitions should be held to improve student skills and foster a spirit of enthusiasm (Ik, 1st interview).

In addition, to improve Arabic language skills through competitions, the design of the material also largely determines the success of learning. As the material obtained in learning Arabic when COVID-19 emergency through textbooks, scientific articles, YouTube content, Arabic articles, song lyrics, and films.

Limitation of learning in the classroom can be added through activities outside the classroom. This can develop students' ability to interact using Arabic. In his interview, Fz stated that:

Arabic learning may include games outside the classroom. It may include holding competitions that improve language skills, such as poetry in Arabic, storytelling, and speeches (Fz, 2nd interview).

Students realize that Arabic learning is not interesting without activities outside the classroom. This is indicated by the limitations of questions and answers approach. Also, the lack of effectiveness of the network hurts student motivation. The opportunity to ask questions and discuss is not as extensive as offline learning. In her interview, Dw reported the following:

The learning was monotonous because the lecturers' methods did not vary (Dw, 3rd interview).

Students need to master three elements of language: sound, vocabulary, and sentence structure. They need to master four language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a balanced way. Limited time and minimal monitoring by lecturers positively affect learning.

Students have various perceptions of effective models through media such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Pictures, and Video. In her interview, Ft reported the following:

Effective learning can be conducted through various media, including WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Classroom (Ft, 4th interview).

These media can be accessed easily, but there are still limited signals to access when far from the city. In her interview, Ft stated the following:

Miscommunication often occurs between students and lecturers related to the given assignment due to weak signals (Ft, 4th interview).

The media used by the lecturer is online-based. For example, WhatsApp is used to instruct students, Instagram to upload assignments and online links for filling quizzes.

The entire media was designed by lecturers and adapted to the material in Arabic books. Each student pays attention to the lecturer by responding to the instructed activities. The need for interaction and clear instructions between lecturers and students increase learning interest. Appropriate time allocation is also an element of success. There are more opportunities for students to learn independently and improve their Arabic language skills. The learning process involves giving questions and doing exercises.

Lecturers make several attempts to ensure the learning is effective. They appreciate student activities, provide inspirational videos, offer advice, and be role models. After the assessment, the lecturer gives appropriate reinforcement. This helps correct words, writing, or vocabulary in the studied material.

Various strategies are used for online Arabic learning, distinguished through four different language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The Strategies of Online Arabic learning during COVID-19 Emergency

The Strategies of Listening Skills

The strategy for listening skills includes songs, watching videos, and listening to Arabic audio. The lecturer gives the material through the link used, and students access the material based on the instructions. Supporting activities outside online learning to improve listening skills include watching films and studying religion through videos in Arabic.

Lecturers monitor student activities when responding to questions. They reprimand and give feedback to help in mastery. Also, there is a reward for those who completing the task effectively. However, in his interview, Ik articulated the following:

The strategy of learning skills is ineffective and poorly controlled (Ik, 1st interview).

Listening material can be delivered through various media, such as Voice Note, WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google meet. Some of these media support the learning of listening skills. Students' listening skills are influenced by the internal motivation that needs to be improved, the drive to use Arabic well, adequate facilities.

However, learning is significantly affected by network limitations. The smoothness of learning is limited to internet connections. Furthermore, lecturer monitoring is minimal and only provides assignments, lowering motivation, strengthening instruction is the key to the effectiveness of online learning. Some lecturers only instruct students on their assignments. However, in the process of activeness and creativity, students are more enthusiastic. They are...
required to create content or upload assignments on social media to provide wider access to learn Arabic. In his interview, Ik reported the following:

*Only a handful of friends are active in online classes, others just listen.* (Ik, 1st interview).

Students' efforts to encourage learning include increased independent activities such as watching videos and listening to the audio carefully. However, this is still not a necessity for learning Arabic.

Learning Arabic online system is inefficient. This is shown by students' lack of response, though this is attributed to unclear instructions, minimal facilitation, and inadequate monitoring.

**The Strategies of Speaking Skills**

Learning speaking skills involve different strategies, including discussion, question and answer, and project conversations in YouTube content. Speaking skills can be improved through online language classes. During discussions, students should present the material or topics discussed for others to respond to. The lecturer should provide direction and guidance at the end of online learning.

Supporting speaking skills outside the online classroom includes communicating with friends through media such as Zoom, WhatsApp Video, and Voice Note. However, there is still minimal monitoring. The lecturer corrects student mistakes, such as wrong pronunciation or vocabulary, privately.

Speaking ability is influenced by vocabulary and the ability to arrange sentences orally. In his interview, Fz internalized the following:

*The key to speaking skills is ourselves. In case we want to memorize vocabulary, we can converse using the language. However, e-learning is less efficient* (Interview Fz, 2nd interview).

In online learning, time, and place efficiency is advantageous. However, limited face-to-face space prevents proper control of the learning process. In some cases, lecturers only give assignments, and minimal material affects students. In her interview, Dw articulated the following:

*Understanding Arabic is difficult without face to face or direct explanation from the lecturer* (Dw, 3rd interview).

The conscious effort is critical for students to reap the benefits of technology in language learning.

**The Strategies of Reading Skills**

Strategies for improving reading skills include understanding reading through the online text and yellow books, as well as understanding the meaning of the content of the Qur’an. Lecturers adopt the material through predetermined textbooks. Furthermore, the material is delivered through reading articles and Arabic newspapers. To determine the understanding of the reading, the lecturer evaluates students using questions through the K-koot application or Google Form. However, the limited network and minimal lecturer instruction affected learning. In his interview, Wk reported the following:

*However, students can still seek clarification directly on the material not understood* (Wk, 5th interview).

However, limited interactions negatively affect learning. The strategies used do not consider the difference in students' abilities. In his interview, Kh stated the following:

*Using online media is not effective because not all students are active* (Kh, 6th interview).

The learning strategies used are also monotonous, lowering students' interest. In his interview, Wk reported the following:

*For reading skills, we are given a reading about Arabic, to add skills in reading texts.* (Wk, 5th interview).

The advantages of the face-to-face learning process directly provide more opportunities for students to ask questions and discuss the readings in contrast to online approach. Lecturers monitor students by correcting the reading or spelling of errors.

**The Strategies of Writing Skills**

Learning to write involves resuming material, doing literary works or chatting in Arabic through social media. Writing activities were minimal during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of lecturer instructions makes students bored. In his interview, Fz articulated the following:

*Learning writing skills online in the COVID-19 era through online is inefficient. This is because writing skills need an understanding of the basic rules in sentence structure* (Fz, 2nd interview).

Some of the media that can be used include Zoom, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom. Through a number of these platforms, students become creative in writing. Assignments are often posted on social media. In his interview, Kh reported the following:

*Assignments are uploaded to every student's Instagram account* (Kh, 6th interview).
Some errors in writing can be commented on and corrected by friends and lecturers. The limited instruction and the lack of lecturer monitoring lowers the enthusiasm of students. Also, lecturers focus on the questions rather than developing students' skills in writing Arabic texts. Proper planning and non-monotonous learning process need to be emphasized.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the results that the learning process at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang with an online learning system is able to make students more active. This has a positive impact on students' creative abilities. As revealed that online learning makes students active and creative (Dočekal & Tulinská, 2015). Online learning provides a great opportunity for students to find Arabic learning resources on online sites. Learning resources are adopted through electronic books, videos, recordings or other conversational materials. This is because students are required to study independently in online activities (Dhawan, 2020). The learning process is also not limited in time, so students can improve their Arabic language skills in the time they want. As revealed that online learning is not limited by space and time (Olmanson & Liu, 2018). But some things that need to be avoided when the online learning process is the use of strategies that are not monotonous. This will cause student motivation to decrease if the lecturer uses a strategy that does not vary. By using a variety of strategies, this can make it easier for lecturers to motivate, provide peer review of the errors produced by students in Arabic. Similarly, students increase the intensity of questions and answers related to the material or language errors produced, motivating minimize errors in Arabic learning (Rahman, 2017).

Essentially, the competence of teachers needs to be trained in a balanced way, both technically and learning content. As is the urgency of teacher professional development (TPD) as an effort to provide assistance (scaffolding) of learning technology for prospective Arabic teachers. This is proven as an effort to improve the quality of learning even though the process is carried out in an online form. As the research findings, it is known that the TPD program is statistically proven to be able to significantly increase the content knowledge for teacher (Abdurrahman et al. 2019). The teacher quality improvement program can be carried out through four varied steps; the process of coaching, mentoring, technical guidance and reflection. This activity can invite experts in certain learning domain, so that there will be discussions, questions and answers in solving problems faced when the online learning process can be resolved. As the findings show, it is known that teacher competence needs to be improved in a balanced manner; pedagogical, personal, professional and social competencies (Safutri et al. 2020). The important point in the learning process should be adapted to developing educational technologies (Tortop, 2014; Ahmadi, 2018). Through improvement of teacher competence continuously, it is expected to provide significant learning outcomes both face-to-face learning and online learning. In the process, online learning requires adequate skills. The process of integrating material, media, strategy and learning evaluation will determine the expected output. Like face-to-face learning, online learning also requires special strategies that require the skills to manage learning information online.

The use of learning strategies is categorized into four language skills. Listening learning using online media is very varied. The use of online applications provides a great opportunity for students to understand material with intense repetition. So that the acquisition of vocabulary, sentence structure and sound recognition can be done optimally. As related about the learning process must be repeated independently to strengthen student understanding of the material (Hockings et al. 2018). The media chosen must also be adapted to the needs and learning objectives of listening. Some of these media support the learning of listening skills. Students' listening skills are influenced by the internal motivation that needs to be improved, the drive to use Arabic well, adequate facilities, the environment, and lecturers as examples (Swathi et al. 2018; Mahmudi et al. 2019; Cook, 2019). Repetition of material can provide encouragement for students to achieve learning goals. As revealed that encouragement from lecturers increases student interest (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). However, there are some things that need to be considered when online learning is like an adequate means, the teacher's skill in designing learning is crucial to the success of online learning.

Learning speaking skills using an online learning system can provide students the opportunity to think critically. This happens when the exchange of ideas when discussing online, even though only within two hours of learning, but this gives students the opportunity to think to convey all the ideas that exist. As revealed that the existence of peer review allows students to think critically and practice speaking skills to express their opinions (Lai et al. 2016). Using online media is very helpful for students in COVID-19 emergency. As is known one of the success in learning is the support of adequate facilities. In accordance with the statement that facilities are the main element that determines the success of learning to speak (Sadiku, 2015). The lack of clear instructions affects students’ interests. Students' speaking abilities are trained through the process of acquiring language online. Students can dig up information about
new vocabulary and structure of new sentences through online discussion. This is in line with the process of language acquisition from new vocabulary (Olmanson & Liu, 2018). However, limited opportunities for teachers to correct students' speaking skills are minimal. This is related to the set time limit for lessons. Besides the importance of clear teacher instruction also determines the success of students in producing Arabic optimally. Lecturers’ indifference in guiding and adopting practical instructions affect student interest. The more creative a lecturer, the better the student’s response (Rusdin, 2018). The conscious effort is critical for students to reap the benefits of technology in language learning.

The process of learning reading skills is very limited. The interaction of lecturers and students is very limited. Especially the discussion about learning new sentence structures. It is different from the face-to-face learning process that provides opportunities for students to ask questions and provides broad opportunities for teachers to explain. As revealed that the process of learning ideal reading skills involves intense interaction between lecturers and students (Zauche et al. 2016). In addition, the need for teacher innovation ability in designing learning materials to read online is also very important. This is supported by that the need for innovations in the delivery of material is the primary concern of lecturers (Harjali, 2019). The spirit of students is also trained in online learning because of their curiosity in learning new readings, even though there is no reward from the teacher when learning. Although there are no penalties for mistakes, rewards are given as appreciations (Deelello et al. 2018). The learning process of writing using an online system based on research results at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim is not effective. This reduces the intensity of the teacher in providing input to the language errors produced by students when writing. The process of discussion of students’ work is also limited. However, when students’ work is uploaded on social media, there are actually more people than teachers and friends in correcting writing errors. As it was also revealed that the peer review function is actually to improve students’ critical thinking skills in giving suggestions to the work of their peers. Peer review provides broad opportunities for students to criticize the writings made by friends to improve their thinking abilities (Hembrough & Jordan, 2020; Febriani et al. 2020).

This study shows that the online Arabic learning process is considered ineffective by students. There is minimal allocation, network limitations, inadequate internal motivation, and limited lecturer instructions. The process of language acquisition involves several strategies, including discussions, lectures, singing, presentations, studying literature, and writing. The strategies used have positive impacts on student outcomes. Further studies should use more extensive areas and samples, as well as more complex research designs. Solutions to improve online learning obstacles, including the method or media used, should also be examined.

The online Arabic learning process is influenced by various determinants, including student internal motivation, lecturer monitoring, adequate facilities, and accessibility to materials. Therefore, the strategies’ weaknesses can be used to make improvements in online Arabic learning. By integrating all components of learning in a holistic and varied manner, students remain motivated to learn, especially during the COVID-19.

Based on the findings of this study, that the urgency of teacher competence in the pedagogic domain aims to provide understanding to students, design and implementation of learning, and develop students to actualize their various potentials. So, the pedagogical competence of a professional lecture can provide educational learning with a dialogical and interactive atmosphere. It is also a complex concern in learning. It also determines the success rate of the process and learning outcomes of students.

**Recommendations**

For further studies should use more extensive areas and samples, as well as use more complex research designs. Solutions to improve online learning obstacles, including the method or media used, should also be examined. The recommendation for the other applicants is how to solve the problem of online learning. As well as conducting development research in order to solve problems faced by students during the online learning process.

**Limitations of the Study**

This research is limited to students' perceptions of online Arabic learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students had inadequate opportunities for interactions.

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References


Appendix 1.
Interview Questions

Please answer the following questions in the table according to your situation!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Process</td>
<td>Is the learning process student-centered or teacher-centered? How do teachers explain the material? What activities do students do in online classrooms in order to improve language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)? Please, mention and describe! What activities do students do outside the classroom in improving language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)? Please, mention and describe! Are students aware of the language learning process? Are students required to master language theory or practical skills in language? Please, give the reason!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Acquisition</td>
<td>What are the steps of learning Arabic in your classroom when using online learning? Please, give a clear describes! What is your learning strategy when you find out what you did wrong in writing? Is there any monitoring from lecturers? Please, give me the process! Can the process of learning Arabic by online learning increase your acquisition of Arabic vocabulary? Can learning Arabic using online learning media improve your writing skills (كتابة) in Arabic? Where do you get reading sources related to the process of learning to read in Arabic? Please, explain the process! Can learning Arabic using online learning media improve your speaking skills (كلام) in Arabic? Can learning Arabic using online learning media improve your reading skills (قراءة) in Arabic? What is your strategy when you find out what your pronunciation is wrong? Is there any monitoring from lecturers? Please, give the process and describe!</td>
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