



Language Anxiety and Barriers in Arabic Language Learning in Secondary Schools

Nova Rahmadhani^{1*}, Fatma Yulia²,

^{1,2}Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: nova03022211015@uinsu.ac.id

Abstract. This study aims to describe the language anxiety experienced by seventh-grade students at MTs Budi Agung Medan, identify the obstacles to learning Arabic and the causes of Arabic language anxiety, and determine the efforts made to reduce such anxiety and overcome learning obstacles. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving seventh-grade students at MTs Budi Agung Medan. The results indicate that the forms of language anxiety include nervousness when asked to speak or read, fear of making mistakes, worry about being laughed at by peers, as well as a lack of self-confidence and halting reading. Factors contributing to Arabic language anxiety include fear of negative reactions, environmental factors, and a lack of motivation. Obstacles to Arabic language learning for Grade VII students at MTs Budi Agung Medan include internal factors such as motivation, learning enthusiasm, and limited facilities and external factors, such as communication issues, teaching methods, and the school environment. Efforts to reduce language-related anxiety involve boosting students' self-confidence, shifting their mindset, and creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere. Strategies to overcome learning barriers include fostering a positive environment and managing time effectively.

Keywords: Arabic Language Learning; Foreign Language Anxiety; Language Acquisition; Language Anxiety; Learning Barriers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is a foreign language widely studied in Indonesia, given its significant role in Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas and pesantrens (Kaltsum et al., 2025). On one hand, Arabic is regarded as a noble language due to its close association with religious values and its status as the language of the Qur'an. On the other hand, its status as a foreign language often presents both cognitive and emotional challenges for students. Anxiety arises from a fear of mispronunciation, concerns about being judged by teachers or peers, and the pressure to achieve the level of precision associated with religious sanctity.

The importance of the Arabic language in Islamic education is undeniable, given its status as the language of the Qur'an. However, the focus of instruction should not be limited to formal linguistic aspects; it should also address the affective domain and communication skills within Arab culture. Unfortunately, practical implementation still faces obstacles. Issues such as the perception that the material is difficult and the use of monotonous teaching methods frequently arise. These conditions result in low learning motivation, the emergence of anxiety, and limited opportunities for students to practice active speaking. (Fudhaili, 2026)

Language anxiety is defined as feelings of fear, nervousness, or a lack of self-confidence experienced by students when using a foreign language whether during speaking activities, while answering questions, or throughout the classroom learning process (Naili & Nur, 2024). Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that language anxiety arises when an individual

experiences negative emotions prior to speaking or conveying a message; this manifests as discomfort, hesitation, or frustration, as well as behavioral changes such as avoiding opportunities to speak. If left unchecked, this anxiety can hinder students' willingness to participate actively and ultimately diminish their academic achievement (Nurislamidina et al., 2025).

According to Rudiansyah et al. (2016), as cited in Mawardi (2023), anxiety is viewed as a factor that hinders the learning process and can impair an individual's cognitive functioning. Individuals experiencing anxiety often perceive learning as an unpleasant experience. In this regard, (Muhammad Mauludi et al., 2025) argue that if this anxiety issue is not addressed, students will increasingly avoid verbal interactions, which could negatively impact their academic performance and their enthusiasm for learning Arabic.

Several previous studies have shown that anxiety is one of the elements that plays a role in the success of learning Arabic. (Sholeha & Baqi, 2022) explain that anxiety in learning Arabic is influenced by psychological aspects, aspects of learning activities and aspects of learning conditions which have a negative impact on students' self-confidence in speaking Arabic. In line with this, (Mawardi et al., 2023) stated that students' concerns arise due to challenges in understanding language structure and vocabulary as well as internal and external factors. This study also confirms that educators can reduce student anxiety by providing motivational support, instilling self-confidence, implementing ice breaking and creating a pleasant atmosphere. In addition, a study by (Kaltsum et al., 2025) shows that success in learning Arabic must be accompanied by encouragement, connection to learning, teaching methods and a supportive learning environment. Constraints from internal and external factors must be overcome by using creative teaching strategies and creating a supportive learning atmosphere.

Mts Budi Agung Medan is one of the Islamic educational institutions that applies Arabic language learning as a compulsory subject. Class VII students at MTs Budi Agung Medan are in the initial stages of formal Arabic learning, where they are introduced to the basics of Arabic including the introduction of hijaiyyah letters, how to read, simple vocabulary and basic sentence structures. This initial stage is a very critical period because students do not yet have the knowledge about learning Arabic, so they are vulnerable to experiencing anxiety when facing Arabic language learning.

Although several studies have explored anxiety in the process of learning Arabic, most have focused primarily on identifying the factors that cause anxiety or the teaching methods employed by instructors. There is a lack of research comprehensively analyzing the

phenomenon of anxiety in Arabic learning from the learners' perspective. Based on the foregoing, this study aims to (1) describe the language anxiety experienced by seventh-grade students at MTs Budi Agung Medan, (2) identify the factors hindering Arabic language learning, and (3) formulate measures to reduce language anxiety and overcome these obstacles. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers in designing more humanistic learning strategies and creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere, thereby helping to reduce students' anxiety levels while learning Arabic.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Definition of Arabic Language Anxiety

According to Budiman (2015), as cited in the study by Naili and Nur (2024), language anxiety refers to a mental state characterized by feelings of worry and apprehension experienced when an individual must speak a language other than their native tongue. Horwitz and Cope (1986:132) state that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a normal form of anxiety, similar to the anxiety experienced during public speaking. Individuals may experience anxiety in various situations; one such instance is the anxiety that arises when communicating in public using a language that is not one's mother tongue (Basith, 2021).

Learning anxiety is an emotional state characterized by imbalance and accompanied by physical tension when facing learning situations. If this anxiety persists, it can negatively impact students' learning outcomes; therefore, it is necessary to reduce learning anxiety to improve academic performance (Sholeha & Baqi, 2022). Anxiety regarding the Arabic language is an emotional response encompassing feelings of worry, stress, nervousness, and fear, as well as physiological reactions such as an increased heart rate, loss of focus, and restlessness associated with the process of learning a foreign language (Zahra et al., 2023).

The concept of language anxiety in the context of second language acquisition represents a significant development in the psycholinguistic study of the relationship between the mind and language. Viewed through the lens of this psychological state, a potential manifestation of the language learning process is the anxiety experienced when using the language (Abdussalam et al., 2026). Consequently, understanding language anxiety is crucial, as it can impact students' confidence, self-assurance, and ability to utilize the language they are learning

Various kinds of anxiety in Arabic

During the process of learning Arabic, students exhibit varying emotional reactions when faced with different learning situations. Some students display enthusiasm and self-confidence, while others experience anxiety when confronted with the need to comprehend material, answer questions, and speak the language. According to (Budiman, 2013), anxiety falls into two categories: normal anxiety and abnormal anxiety. First, normal anxiety occurs when an individual takes steps to protect themselves while feeling pressured or threatened. Second, abnormal anxiety can lead to mental health issues such as stress, panic, depression, and hallucinations and instill deep-seated fear within a person's life experiences.

According to (Naili & Nur, 2024), in their research, this type of anxiety is divided into two categories, namely fear of communicating and fear of negative responses, the explanation is as follows. The first is fear of communication, which refers to individual concerns regarding competence to express thoughts fluently, choose appropriate words and master language that is well understood. Second, they are afraid of negative responses, which is a form of anxiety that is often experienced by students. they often feel anxious and worried about other people's negative views on their speaking competence in Arabic. Students feel pressured to be evaluated in depth or students feel dissatisfied with the way they communicate. This can lead to deeper feelings of insecurity and anxiety when speaking Arabic.

Causes of Arabic language anxiety

Arabic language learning encompasses more than just linguistic aspects; it is also influenced by psychological elements that affect communication skills. A positive psychological state fosters learning achievement, whereas a negative psychological state can hinder language proficiency (Abdussalam et al., 2026). According to (Budiman, 2013), factors associated with foreign language anxiety are influenced by negative perceptions or mindsets that lead to a lack of self-confidence and a pessimistic attitude. In this regard, educational psychology expert Horwitz (1986) states that the causes of foreign language anxiety fall into three main factors: First, Communication anxiety or the fear of speaking refers to the anxiety that arises when one has to speak to others or when others are listening. Second, Test anxiety or exam-related anxiety is a form of tension associated with the fear of performing poorly or even failing completely. Third, Fear of negative evaluation relates to concerns about how one is perceived by others such as instructors, classmates, or other individuals and may stem from a lack of confidence in one's own language abilities.

According to research (Nurislamidina et al., 2025), there are several causes of anxiety experienced by students, including:

- a. Being made a laughingstock specifically due to unsupportive behavior such as mockery from classmates or teachers is a primary factor contributing to anxiety among students. Many students believe they will become objects of ridicule if they make a mistake.
- b. Regarding students' beliefs about language learning, a specific belief has also been identified as a factor influencing student anxiety. Many students perceive Arabic as a complex subject.
- c. A lack of preparation or insufficient preparation is also a significant factor contributing to anxiety among students. Some students have expressed experiencing high levels of anxiety when they have not adequately prepared for exams or speaking exercises.

Obstacles in learning Arabic

According to Supriadi (2020), as cited in the study by (Sakdiah & Sihombing, 2023), the difficulties or obstacles students face in learning Arabic stem from two factors. The first is linguistic obstacles; these have the greatest impact on learning outcomes, as linguistic elements function like software for the student during the learning process. The second factor involves non-linguistic issues challenges that originate externally yet still influence the learning process.

- a. Linguistic barriers or language barriers are challenges students face when learning Arabic, stemming from the language's unique characteristics as a foreign language. These linguistic issues encompass phonetic challenges related to the sound system or phonology, vocabulary difficulties, and grammatical complexities including word-level aspects (*sharfiyah*) and sentence structure (*nahwiyyah*).
- b. Non-linguistic barriers are factors related to language learning that are not directly connected to linguistic aspects. Examples include motivation, student interest in learning, teaching ability, and the learning process experienced by the learners. (Kamilah, 2023)

The main problem of learning Arabic that needs to be resolved is the commitment of students in learning and the dedication of teachers in teaching. This commitment cannot start from being forced to follow a curriculum that limits creativity in gaining knowledge and honing skills. (Idris, 2024) The challenges of learning Arabic as a second language can be faced in innovative and efficient ways. Appropriate methods for overcoming obstacles in pronunciation, enriching learning resources and creating support for vocabulary use can support students in optimizing their skills in Arabic. Continuous support and input from teachers is crucial to supporting students in facing obstacles and achieving the best learning outcomes. (Fitriyah, 2024)

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach specifically a descriptive case study aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the language anxiety experienced by students during Arabic language learning, as well as the obstacles encountered in the learning process. A qualitative approach was selected because the study emphasizes the meanings, experiences, and psychological states of students within the natural context of actual learning situations. In qualitative research, the process begins by defining the research project. Subsequently, it involves formulating questions related to the project, gathering information relevant to those questions, compiling notes from the obtained data, and conducting an analysis. These stages are repeated as necessary, depending on the scope and level of detail required by the research questions (Ahyyar et al., 2020).

Data collection was carried out using three methods: observation of the learning process in Grade VII classes at MTs Budi Agung; interviews to gather in-depth data regarding the anxiety and obstacles experienced by students during lessons; and documentation to obtain data on the learning process itself. The subjects of this study were Grade VII students at MTs Budi Agung Medan.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language Anxiety Experienced by Students at MTs Budi Agung Medan

Arabic language learning is influenced not only by academic ability but also by the psychological state students experience during the learning process. While some students appear to handle the lessons well, others display attitudes indicating anxiety when Arabic instruction begins. This anxiety arises when students face situations requiring them to use their Arabic language skills whether reading, speaking, or answering the teacher's questions. This aligns with Pratiwi (2023), who notes that individuals experiencing anxiety often harbor persistent worries about potential misfortunes befalling themselves or those close to them. Such individuals are often unaware of their condition, prone to irritability, frequently complain, and struggle to concentrate.

Research findings indicate that the language anxiety experienced by 7th-grade students at MTs Budi Agung during Arabic language lessons manifests in several ways: students appearing nervous when asked to speak or read, fearing mistakes, fearing ridicule from peers, and lacking confidence when performing tasks in front of the class. According to Sholeha and Baqi (2022), students' emotional states are closely linked to the level of anxiety experienced while learning a foreign language. Students who experience positive emotions tend to be

calmer, more confident, and more motivated during lessons. Conversely, negative emotions can heighten anxiety, potentially hindering the learning process. Therefore, managing students' emotional states by creating an enjoyable learning environment is a crucial step toward reducing language anxiety and fostering optimal learning outcomes (Sholeha & Baqi, 2022)

Based on interview results, anxiety regarding the use of a foreign language (Arabic) is closely linked to motivational factors. This is because an individual's motivation establishes a foundation of conviction, goal-setting, and self-confidence necessary for communicating in Arabic. According to psychologists, this aligns with the view of McDonald (1959) as cited by Sadirman (2001: 71) that motivation is an energy transformation within the individual, characterized by the emergence of feelings and preceded by a desired goal (Budiman, 2013).

Factors Causing Arabic Language Anxiety Among Students at MTs Budi Agung Medan

Based on the results of research conducted on seventh-grade students at MTs Budi Agung, there are several factors contributing to Arabic language anxiety. These are as follows:

- a. Anxiety about negative reactions, observations revealed signs of nervousness or a lack of confidence stemming from a fear of peers' reactions such as being laughed at or a fear of being reprimanded by the teacher for making mistakes. These findings align with Alfian et al. (2022); such discomfort arises from the fear of failing to make a positive impression on others or the worry of not meeting their expectations. This anxiety may manifest as a fear of negative judgment from peers or instructors, apprehension about receiving criticism, or concern about being labeled as incapable of speaking Arabic (Alfian et al., 2022).
- b. Environmental factors, interviews with 7th-grade students at MTs Budi Agung indicate that a supportive environment contributes to student success in learning Arabic. Naziha argues that a conventional environment can cause enthusiastic students to become reluctant to use Arabic or feel pressured due to the lack of a supportive atmosphere. The environment is a key element in language skill development and can help prevent various forms of language anxiety (Naziha et al., 2023).
- c. Lack of motivation, interviews with 7th-grade students at MTs Budi Agung Medan revealed that a lack of learning motivation is a contributing factor to anxiety. Some students admitted to lacking enthusiasm for lessons because they found Arabic difficult to comprehend. This aligns with Abdussalam's assertion that a lack of motivation is an internal factor contributing to the emergence of anxiety in Arabic language learning. Students with high motivation are enthusiastic about participating in learning activities, confident in communicating in Arabic, and determined to overcome challenges that arise. Conversely,

low motivation can lead to a lack of enthusiasm and reluctance to participate in activities requiring the use of Arabic (Abdussalam et al., 2026).

Factors Hindering Arabic Language Learning Among 7th-Grade Students at MTs Budi Agung Medan

As previously outlined, students often encounter difficulties in comprehending learning materials during the instructional process. Various factors both internal and external hinder students from achieving an optimal understanding of Arabic lessons (Eka & Tatang, 2021). Based on the interviews conducted, the factors hindering Arabic language learning for Grade VII students at MTs Budi Agung Medan are as follows:

Below are several intrinsic factors that hinder learning Arabic, First, regarding motivation and the drive to learn: based on the interviews conducted, and drawing on Suryabrata (2010) as cited in Rahma (2019) the drive to learn is defined as an internal mental impetus that triggers learning activity and sustains the learning process, aiming to achieve a specific goal by establishing suitable conditions. A lack of motivation in this learning context is evident in a student's level of engagement, a lack of seriousness, a tendency toward laziness in completing individual or group assignments, and a low level of curiosity.(Eka & Tatang, 2021) Secondly, there are limitations regarding school facilities; existing facilities are often inadequate or instance, there is a lack of audiovisual aids or supporting applications that could otherwise be utilized to enhance listening and speaking skills. This situation renders the learning process less engaging and less in-depth, preventing students from gaining an optimal learning experience.(Pramesti et al., 2025)

In addition to the intrinsic factors that can influence the process of learning Arabic, there are also extrinsic factors, namely:

- a. lack of communication, instructors make very limited use of Arabic as the primary language of instruction in the classroom. Learning activities tend to be one-sided, with students merely listening to the instructor's explanations rather than having opportunities for interaction. Consequently, students gain little experience in Arabic listening skills and lack sufficient time to practice verbal responses a key component of speaking proficiency..(Daoed & Lailaa, 2025)
- b. Learning methods, teaching methods play a crucial role in facilitating educational activities; effectively, an efficient educational process requires the implementation of diverse teaching techniques. In this context, the educator is responsible for selecting appropriate methods to ensure an efficient educational process that aligns with instructional objectives.(Sholeha & Baqi, 2022)

- c. School environment, according to Nasution and Zulheddi (2020), the instructor's attitude, the teaching techniques employed, and the resources used during the learning process are among the elements that influence students in learning Arabic. Furthermore, the reliance on textbooks as a medium and the limited opportunities to practice speaking Arabic are also factors contributing to the difficulties students face in learning the language.(Nasution Mardiana et al., 2025)
- d. Ability to read and write the Al-Qur'an, students who are proficient in reading and writing the Quran typically show greater interest in learning Arabic, as they feel more familiar with the script, Arabic grammar, and the vowel marks. (Nasution Mardiana et al., 2025).

The preceding discussion illustrates that the success of the Arabic language learning process is influenced by numerous interconnected factors. However, the specific obstacles encountered may vary from school to school, depending on the circumstances of the students, the teaching staff, and the learning environment.

Efforts to Reduce Language Anxiety and Overcome Obstacles in Learning Arabic

Language anxiety is one of the most significant emotional obstacles in the process of learning a foreign language, including Arabic. This type of anxiety differs from general learning difficulties due to its affective or psychological nature; nevertheless, its impact can hinder the Arabic learning process for seventh-grade students at MTs Budi Agung. Therefore, the following section outlines strategies to reduce language anxiety and ways to overcome obstacles in learning Arabic.

Efforts made to overcome anxiety about the Arabic language

According to Asrori (2016), a learning strategy is a plan encompassing a series of activities including the application of methods and the utilization of various resources or assets within the learning process (Umam & Wijaya, 2025). Consequently, a well-designed teaching approach can help mitigate learning barriers, including anxiety associated with learning Arabic. The following are strategies for addressing language-related anxiety.

- a. Increasing students' self-confidence, increasing students' self-confidence is one of the important steps to reduce anxiety in speaking Arabic. High self-confidence will encourage students to be more courageous in speaking, expressing their thoughts and reducing the fear of making mistakes during the learning process. Teachers can foster students' self-confidence by providing encouragement, appreciating every effort shown and creating a comfortable and non-judgmental learning environment.(Pramesti et al., 2025)
- b. Shifting students' mindsets toward a more optimistic outlook is one strategy that can be employed to reduce anxiety associated with learning Arabic. Citing Kondo and Ying-Ling

(2004), Alfian et al. (2022) state that optimistic thinking is a method for addressing student anxiety specifically anxiety rooted in fear by redirecting attention toward circumstances or environments that foster positivity and a sense of calm (Alfian et al., 2022). Students should be guided to recognize that making mistakes during the learning process is normal and an integral part of the journey toward acquiring knowledge and language skills. With this mindset, students will no longer view errors as a source of embarrassment, but rather as opportunities to learn and improve their abilities.

- c. Creating a learning atmosphere that is enjoyable, supportive, and inspiring allows students to feel secure enough to participate without fear of criticism or ridicule when making mistakes. According to Dornyei (2001, p. 40), as cited in research by (Thomas Joko Priyo, 2018), educators need to establish a friendly and pleasant environment to avoid—or at least minimize—student anxiety. Teachers can cultivate such an atmosphere by employing teaching methods that incorporate interaction, educational games, and group discussions, while maintaining warm communication and valuing every contribution.

Efforts to Overcome Obstacles in Arabic Language Learning

Achieving educational goals—which encompass the development of high-quality individuals in terms of both faith and knowledge—requires collaboration among educational and instructional institutions (Irwansyah, 2023). Overcoming obstacles in the learning process is not solely the teacher's burden; rather, it demands synergy among educational institutions, educators, and all parties involved in learning activities. Effective cooperation will help create a supportive learning environment.

When a student encounters challenges and obstacles in learning Arabic, an appropriate solution must be sought immediately; if left unaddressed, the student's comprehension could be hindered, potentially even leading them to abandon their study of the language (Eka & Tatang, 2021). The measures to overcome these obstacles in Arabic language learning are as follows: First, Creating a positive environment and an atmosphere that supports the Arabic learning process can be achieved by organizing an "Arabic Language Day" program, which aims to familiarize students and teachers with communicating in Arabic during their daily school activities. Furthermore, displaying posters or phrases in Arabic throughout the school premises can increase students' exposure to the language and encourage them to use it more frequently (Pramesti et al., 2025). Second, Managing time effectively, during the learning process, students need to really concentrate so that learning goals are achieved. So that attention remains intact when studying, effective time management is needed, when we have to study,

when we need to memorize vocabulary, when to repeat material and when it is best to practice using Arabic..(Eka & Tatang, 2021)

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that 7th-grade students at MTs Budi Agung Medan experience language anxiety during the Arabic learning process. This is evident in their feelings of unease when asked to speak or read, fear of making mistakes, concern about negative evaluations from teachers or peers, and a lack of self-confidence when performing in front of the class. This anxiety is influenced by several factors, including the fear of negative reactions, an unsupportive learning environment, and low learning motivation. Furthermore, Arabic language instruction faces various obstacles stemming from both internal and external factors, such as low learning enthusiasm and motivation, limited educational facilities, a lack of classroom interaction in Arabic, a lack of diverse teaching methods, a school environment that does not support Arabic usage, and varying levels of student proficiency in reading and writing the Quran. The study findings suggest several strategies to alleviate language anxiety and overcome learning obstacles. These include boosting students' self-confidence, fostering a positive mindset regarding mistakes during the learning process, creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere, establishing a supportive school environment, and managing study time efficiently. Therefore, it can be concluded that success in Arabic language learning does not depend solely on students' academic abilities but is also influenced by interconnected factors such as mental state, motivation, teaching methods, and the learning environment.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that Arabic language teachers implement teaching methods that are more communicative, interactive, and student-centered. This aims to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and reduce language-related anxiety. Schools are also expected to provide a more supportive environment by offering adequate learning resources and programs that encourage the use of Arabic in daily activities. This study has limitations, as it was conducted solely with 7th-grade students at MTs Budi Agung using a case study approach. Therefore, future research is encouraged to involve a larger number of subjects, employ different research approaches or methods, and examine teaching strategies that are effective in reducing language anxiety and enhancing student motivation in Arabic lessons.

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