

## Teaching Arabic Grammar to Non-Native Speakers in Malaysia: Challenges and Solutions

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### Abstract

Grammar is one of the most important branches of the Arabic language. Despite its immense importance, teaching and learning grammar to non-native speakers still faces several challenges and obstacles. This study aims to examine the teaching of Arabic grammar to non-native speakers in Malaysia, focusing on the major challenges encountered in the educational process and proposing appropriate pedagogical and practical solutions. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology based on the review of previous studies, analysis of the prescribed curricula, and consideration of the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Malaysian learners. The study concludes that Malaysian learners face multiple difficulties in acquiring Arabic grammar due to the structural differences between Arabic and Malay, the weakness of the surrounding linguistic environment, and the use of traditional teaching approaches that neglect communicative contexts. The findings also indicate that the adopted curricula require revision and modernization, and that teacher training and the integration of technology can significantly enhance the effectiveness of grammar instruction. The study recommends simplifying grammatical content, integrating grammar with language skills, developing a pedagogical guide for the Malaysian context, and strengthening teacher training for teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers.

**Keywords:** Grammar Instruction, Non-Native Arabic Speakers, Learning Difficulties, Challenges, Solutions

### Introduction

The teaching of Arabic to non-native speakers has witnessed remarkable development in recent decades, driven by the growing need to learn Arabic for religious, academic, or professional purposes. Arabic grammar holds a central position in this field, as it serves as a vital tool for understanding texts, clarifying meanings, and enhancing linguistic performance in both written and spoken forms. However, non-native speakers often face considerable difficulties in learning Arabic grammar, especially in contexts where the structural features of

the mother tongue differ significantly from those of Arabic. This is particularly evident in Malaysia, where the native language is Malay and English is widely used in education.

No doubt learning Arabic grammar poses a psychological and linguistic obstacle for many international students if it is not presented in ways appropriate to their language levels and cultural and educational circumstances. This highlights the need to reassess the teaching methods and curricula adopted in Malaysian educational institutions to ensure the effectiveness of grammar instruction and to achieve its communicative objectives, particularly in light of digital transformation and modern educational approaches (Mohd K. N., 2019). Within this context, the present study seeks to examine the current state of Arabic grammar instruction for non-native speakers in Malaysia, analyze the challenges they face, and propose pedagogical and linguistic solutions grounded in theoretical studies and previous educational experiences, while taking into account the specific characteristics of Malaysian learners and their surrounding learning environment.

Accordingly, this study aims to address the following research questions: what are the main challenges faced by non-native speakers in learning Arabic grammar within the Malaysian context, what are the shortcomings of the currently used curricula and teaching methods, and what possible solutions can be proposed to overcome these difficulties? To answer these questions, the objectives of the study are to explore the current state of Arabic grammar instruction for non-native speakers in Malaysia, identify the key obstacles hindering the effective learning of grammar, and propose developmental strategies to improve teaching methods in this context. This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach by analyzing previous studies, educational content, and the curricula adopted in teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers in Malaysian universities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

*The Concept of Grammar and Its Instructional Objectives for Non-Native Speakers of Arabic*  
Grammar is traditionally defined in its simplest form as a following the path of the Arabs' speech in its usage of grammar and other things, such as dual, plural, diminutive, amplification, addition, relation, composition, and other things, so that those who are not native to the Arabic language may catch up with those who are native to it in eloquence and pronounce it even if they are not among them. And if some of them turn away from it, they are returned to it. It is originally a common source, meaning I adopted a grammar like you say: I intended an intention" (Ibn Jinni, n.d., p. 25). In educational contexts, grammar is viewed as a tool for organizing relationships between words within a sentence to ensure clarity of meaning and syntactic correctness. Grammar instruction is considered a fundamental component of language education, as it enables learners to comprehend texts and attain linguistic accuracy in both written and spoken expression (Waliyuddin, 2024; Wahba, 2022). The primary objectives of teaching grammar to non-native speakers of Arabic include developing learners' ability to comprehend and correctly use Arabic structures, thereby facilitating accurate communication. Grammar instruction also aims to enhance writing skills by reducing syntactic errors and improving the organization and clarity of written expression. In addition, a strong grammatical foundation supports reading proficiency by enabling learners to understand complex and lengthy sentences with greater ease. Furthermore, mastery of grammar equips students with the analytical skills necessary to engage with literary and religious texts effectively (Al-Qasimi, 2012).

It is important to note that some educators emphasize the need to teach grammar as a means rather than an end, highlighting that grammar instruction should serve the broader linguistic skills and not be taught in isolation, especially for non-native learners (Khalousi, 2024; Abdul Qader, 2022).

### *Contemporary Approaches to Teaching Grammar to Non-Native Speakers of Arabic*

The field of teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers has witnessed considerable developments in response to evolving trends in foreign language education. Several prominent instructional approaches have emerged, each addressing different learner needs and contexts:

**The Inductive Approach:** The inductive approach introduces learners to authentic texts before presenting explicit grammatical rules. Through observation, comparison, and inference, students deduce grammatical structures independently. This method is particularly effective for advanced learners, as it fosters analytical skills and promotes contextualized learning. Empirical studies have demonstrated its success in enhancing engagement and reducing the monotony associated with traditional grammar instruction (Abdul Latif, 2020; Najiah, 2023).

**The Deductive Approach:** In contrast, the deductive approach begins with a direct and explicit explanation of grammatical rules, followed by illustrative examples and structured practice. This method is well-suited for beginner learners who require clear and systematic instruction to build a strong foundational understanding of grammatical concepts (Husein, 2019).

**Communicative Grammar Teaching:** This approach integrates grammar instruction within real-life communicative contexts, emphasizing the practical use of grammatical structures in meaningful interaction. It aims to develop learners' communicative competence, particularly in environments where exposure to Arabic outside the classroom is limited (Azhar, 2022; Al-Harbi, 2015).

**The Integrated Approach:** The integrated approach teaches grammar alongside the four core language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing through holistic and interactive activities. It aligns with contemporary language teaching frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which advocate for skill integration to promote comprehensive language proficiency (Yaseen, 2024).

Overall, the shift towards more learner-centered, skill-integrated, and communicative approaches reflects an increasing recognition of the diverse needs of non-native Arabic learners and the importance of contextually appropriate pedagogical strategies.

### *General Challenges in Teaching Grammar to Non-Native Speakers of Arabic*

Studies indicate that teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers presents several challenges, particularly in contexts like Malaysia. One major issue is the abstract nature of Arabic grammatical rules, which often lack direct equivalents in learners' native languages, making them difficult to grasp. Additionally, the rigidity and dryness of traditional methods can discourage learners, failing to address individual learning differences. The limited use of modern educational media and technological tools further exacerbates the problem by restricting innovative ways to explain complex grammatical concepts. Furthermore, the

linguistic duality between Modern Standard Arabic and local dialects creates confusion, as learners struggle to reconcile the formal rules of Modern Standard Arabic with the variations found in colloquial forms. Researchers emphasize that addressing these challenges requires a systematic review of the nature of grammatical content, its presentation methods, and the qualifications of teachers, especially in Asian contexts such as Malaysia (Idlebi, 2020).

### **Grammar Instruction in the Malaysian Context**

#### *An Overview of Educational Institutions Concerned with Teaching Arabic in Malaysia*

Malaysia has demonstrated increasing interest in Arabic language instruction, particularly within public Islamic universities such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), the University of Malaya (UM), and the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM), alongside various language institutes and centers affiliated with religious secondary schools and selected national schools. Arabic grammar is taught in these institutions as an integral part of the curricula in Arabic language programs, whether as a major or a university-wide requirement. It is observed that many of these programs either adopt curricula imported from the Arab world or are developed locally with the participation of Arab academics. This often results in a lack of alignment between the grammatical content and the specific needs of Malaysian learners (Kadir, 2001).

#### *Analysis of Curricula and Prescribed Textbooks*

In Malaysia, some universities rely on textbooks such as the Al-Kitāb al-Asāsī series from the Language Institute at Imam University, along with Al-'Arabiyyah Bayna Yadayk and Al-Madkhal ilā al-'Arabiyyah. These textbooks, originally authored in Arab contexts, aim to integrate the four core language skills while gradually presenting grammar. However, these materials have faced criticism for several reasons. First, they are designed primarily for Arab learners or students whose linguistic backgrounds are closely related to Arabic, making them less suitable for non-native speakers. Second, they often rely on rote learning methods for teaching grammar, which limits their ability to contextualize and connect grammar to real-life usage. Third, they do not adequately consider the proficiency levels of Malaysian students, who typically lack immersive language environments in Arabic. To address these challenges, some Malaysian universities have taken steps to develop more context-appropriate curricula. For example, the Interactive Arabic Curriculum at the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia emphasizes skill integration and situational learning, simplifying grammatical content to better align with the needs of Malaysian learners (Mohd, 2019; Hassan, 2022).

#### *Characteristics of the Malaysian Learner and Their Impact on Grammar Learning*

The educational environment in Malaysia is shaped by several factors that influence the acquisition of Arabic grammar. One key characteristic is the mother tongue, Malay, which is an analytic language that lacks the inflectional structures, case endings, or changes in word form found in Arabic. This structural disparity makes Arabic grammar cognitively challenging for learners. Additionally, the limited exposure to Arabic outside the classroom further impedes natural language acquisition, as real-life situations requiring the use of Arabic are scarce. While many learners are motivated to study Arabic for Qur'anic or Islamic studies, which provides positive intrinsic motivation, this alone is insufficient to overcome the complexities of grammar without effective pedagogical support. Moreover, large class sizes and group-based instruction reduce opportunities for interactive learning and individualized grammar practice. Studies have revealed that many Malaysian students prefer practical,

application-based learning and often rely on memorization rather than analyzing examples. This calls for a reassessment of grammar teaching methods to better align with their learning preferences (Ghani, 2019).

#### *The Teacher's Role in Presenting Grammar in the Malaysian Context*

The teacher plays a pivotal role in the success of grammar instruction, especially in non-Arabic-speaking environments such as Malaysia. However, several challenges in the Malaysian context complicate effective grammar teaching. One significant issue is the variability in teacher competence, as not all instructors specializing in grammar possess the required expertise in the subject. Additionally, there is a persistent reliance on traditional methods, with grammar often taught through direct explanation and dictation, lacking the use of communicative strategies or interactive activities to engage students (Zaki, 2024). Furthermore, teachers are rarely given opportunities for continuous professional development, particularly in utilizing modern tools to simplify grammar instruction or integrate grammar with other language skills. Local educational reports underscore the urgent need for specialized training programs for both Malaysian and Arab teachers working in Malaysia. These programs should focus on teaching grammar as a communicative tool rather than an abstract subject, considering the linguistic and cultural diversity within the classroom (Roslan, 2020; Anwar, 2020; Hussein, 2019).

#### *Challenges and Difficulties in Teaching Arabic Grammar in the Malaysian Context*

Teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers presents particular challenges in the Malaysian context due to linguistic, cultural, and educational differences between Arabic and the Malay environment. The most prominent difficulties can be classified into four main categories:

##### *Learner-Related Challenges*

Learner-related challenges constitute a major obstacle to effective Arabic grammar acquisition among Malaysian students. One primary difficulty stems from the structural differences between Arabic and Malay; Malay is an analytic language that lacks inflectional endings and case markers based on syntactic position, and does not rely on morphological indicators to determine word order. This makes Arabic grammar, with its complex inflectional system, unfamiliar and cognitively demanding for Malaysian learners (Abdulrahman 2019). In addition, many students possess weak lexical knowledge and limited contextual understanding, which hinders their ability to comprehend grammatical examples and, consequently, affects their grasp of grammatical rules. Negative psychological attitudes toward grammar further exacerbate these difficulties. For many learners, grammar is perceived as an abstract and difficult subject, leading to low motivation and a tendency toward rote memorization without genuine comprehension phenomenon often referred to as "Grammar Phobia" in the literature (Al-Harbi, 2015; Mat Taib, 2011).

##### *Curriculum and Content-Related Challenges*

Curriculum and content-related challenges also pose significant obstacles to effective Arabic grammar instruction for non-native speakers. Many prescribed textbooks maintain a rigid academic tone, heavily relying on technical terminology at the expense of practical application, making comprehension difficult for foreign learners. Furthermore, numerous curricula are primarily designed for Arab students or those learning within Arab-related

environments, often overlooking the cultural and cognitive differences of Malaysian learners, which leads to a clear mismatch between the content and the learners' abilities. Another major issue is the insufficient integration of grammar instruction with the four essential language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, thereby reducing grammar to a set of isolated rules that learners must memorize. Listening, as the foundational skill, involves understanding spoken language, such as following a teacher's instructions or comprehending an audio recording. Speaking requires the ability to express ideas orally in a fluent and grammatically correct manner, for example, through class discussions or presentations. Reading enhances vocabulary development and syntactic awareness by enabling learners to comprehend written texts like stories or newspaper articles. Writing, in turn, demands the correct application of spelling, grammar, and stylistic conventions when composing texts such as letters, essays, or reports (Alshaibani, 2021). The lack of integration between grammar and these skills weakens the communicative value of instruction and limits learners' ability to apply grammatical rules in real-life situations.

#### *Teacher and Instruction-Related Challenges*

Teacher- and instruction-related challenges also significantly impact the effectiveness of Arabic grammar teaching for non-native speakers. Although many teachers possess strong Arabic language skills, some lack pedagogical competence, relying predominantly on direct explanation without employing interactive or communicative activities to engage learners. This issue is further compounded by the limited availability of specialized professional development opportunities, such as training workshops focused on teaching grammar to non-native speakers, which restricts teachers' ability to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students. Additionally, a heavy reliance on traditional methods, such as rote memorization, dictation, and repetitive exercises, persists among many instructors. While these methods may be somewhat effective in Arabic-speaking environments, they prove inadequate in the Malaysian context, where active learning strategies and the incorporation of modern educational media are crucial to fostering meaningful language acquisition (Roslan, 2020; Anwar, 2020; Zaini, 2019; Ismail, 2022).

#### *Challenges Related to the Educational Environment*

The educational environment presents several challenges that hinder the effective teaching of Arabic grammar to non-native speakers. One major issue is the lack of a supportive language environment, where students have limited opportunities to use Arabic outside the classroom (Abdelhafid, 2024). This isolation of grammatical rules from real-world contexts prevents learners from applying what they have learned in authentic communication situations. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms and limited individual attention pose significant obstacles; large class sizes reduce the teacher's ability to provide personalized feedback on grammar usage, thereby diminishing the overall effectiveness of instruction. Another challenge is the overreliance on prescribed textbooks without diversifying educational sources, which results in static and uninspiring instructional content that often lacks relevance to the students' daily lives and fails to engage them meaningfully (Haron, 2025).

*Solutions and Proposals for Improving the Teaching of Arabic Grammar to Non-Native Speakers in Malaysia*

In light of the challenges outlined in the previous section, enhancing the teaching of Arabic grammar to non-native speakers, particularly within the Malaysian context, requires a comprehensive set of solutions that consider learners' proficiency levels, the peculiarities of their mother tongue, the educational environment, and the adopted instructional methodologies. The following are some of the most significant practical recommendations that can be implemented:

*Simplifying Grammatical Content and Structuring It According to Learner Proficiency*

To enhance the effectiveness of Arabic grammar instruction for non-native speakers, several pedagogical strategies should be considered. First, it is essential to avoid introducing abstract grammatical concepts at the beginner level and instead focus on rules that are directly relevant to daily communication (Wahyuddin, 2021). A gradual pedagogical progression should also be employed, moving from simple to more complex sentence structures, with grammatical rules presented within authentic and meaningful contexts rather than as isolated abstract principles (Al-Buaimi, 2016). Furthermore, the reliance on purely technical grammatical terminology should be reduced by incorporating functional equivalents or real-life examples, making the material more accessible and relatable for learners (Al-Haddad, 2024).

*Utilizing Educational Technology and Multimedia Tools*

The integration of educational technology and multimedia tools can significantly enhance the teaching of Arabic grammar to non-native speakers. Interactive applications such as "Kahoot" and "Quizlet" should be incorporated to reinforce grammatical concepts engagingly and dynamically. Additionally, developing short educational videos that explain grammatical rules through animations or real-life scenarios can help simplify complex ideas and maintain student interest. Moreover, adopting digital learning platforms that allow learners to practice grammar autonomously provides opportunities for individualized learning and continuous reinforcement (Al-Aboud and Ibrahim, 2022).

*Integrating Grammar Instruction with Language Skills*

An effective approach to teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers involves integrating grammar instruction with the development of core language skills. Grammar rules should be introduced through listening to or reading texts, allowing learners to deduce the rules contextually before engaging in active practice through speaking and writing. Additionally, grammar instruction should be closely connected to everyday situations, such as describing places, discussing activities, or expressing opinions, to make learning more relevant and practical. Interactive linguistic tasks, including group work, role-playing, and project-based learning, should also be promoted to create dynamic and collaborative learning environments that enhance both grammatical understanding and communicative competence (Al-Harbi, 2015; Hassan, 2024).

*Developing a Specialized Instructional Guide for Teaching Grammar to Non-Native Speakers*

It is recommended that relevant authorities, such as faculties of Arabic language or institutes for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, develop a specialized methodological guide tailored to the Malaysian context. This guide should include a carefully selected list of

grammar rules appropriate for each proficiency level, strategies for presenting grammatical concepts in a simplified manner, suggested activities and exercises to reinforce learning, and consideration of the structural differences between Arabic and Malay to better address the specific needs of learners.

#### *Teacher Training and Professional Development*

To improve the effectiveness of Arabic grammar instruction, there is a pressing need to focus on teacher training and professional development. Regular workshops should be organized to introduce and reinforce communicative grammar teaching methodologies. Moreover, facilitating knowledge exchange between Arab and Malaysian instructors in the design of educational materials and activities can contribute to richer, more culturally relevant instruction. Incorporating dedicated modules on contextual grammar instruction within teacher preparation programs is also essential to equip future teachers with the necessary skills and strategies (Al-Haddad, 2022).

#### *Updating Curricula and Prescribed Textbooks*

A critical review of existing Arabic textbooks is necessary to ensure a gradual, concrete, and contextually appropriate presentation of grammatical concepts, aligned with the Malaysian educational environment (Ghani, 2021). Curricula should be updated to include practical exercises and interactive activities within every unit, making grammar learning more engaging and effective. Furthermore, diversifying educational sources by integrating written, visual, and audio materials can significantly enhance learners' understanding and application of grammatical rules (Khalousi, 2024).

#### *Creating a Supportive Linguistic Environment Within Educational Institutions*

Creating a supportive linguistic environment within educational institutions is essential for promoting the practical use of grammar. Establishing language clubs or organizing weekly conversation sessions can provide valuable opportunities for students to apply grammar communicatively. Students should be encouraged to use Arabic both inside and outside the classroom to reinforce their language skills. Additionally, incorporating light grammatical rules into bulletin boards or designing small-scale language games within institutes or faculties can help sustain learners' engagement with grammar in a more informal and enjoyable manner. These practical measures, when supported by institutional commitment and comprehensive pedagogical preparation for both teachers and instructional materials, have the potential to significantly enhance Malaysian students' proficiency in Arabic grammar (Almelhes, 2024).

#### **Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations**

This study has demonstrated that teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers within the Malaysian context faces a range of challenges stemming from linguistic, pedagogical, institutional, and cultural factors. These challenges significantly impact the effectiveness of the educational process and hinder learners' ability to comprehend and apply grammatical rules accurately. The study concludes that these challenges do not lie solely in the nature of Arabic grammar itself, but rather in the way it is presented to learners, the suitability of curricula, teacher competency, instructional strategies, and the availability of a supportive learning environment. It has also been shown that overcoming these difficulties requires a holistic approach that includes simplifying content, utilizing educational technology, training

teachers, and developing culturally and linguistically appropriate curricula for Malaysian learners. Improving grammar instruction in non-Arabic environments such as Malaysia is not an impossible task. It is indeed achievable when guided by well-designed plans rooted in a deep understanding of the challenges, a thoughtful appreciation of learners' needs, and genuine institutional and pedagogical collaboration. This research serves as a foundational step in this direction, with the hope that it will be followed by applied field studies resulting in effective instructional models suitable for the 21st century.

This theoretical and analytical study has yielded several key findings regarding the teaching of Arabic grammar to non-native speakers in Malaysia:

1. Malaysian learners face multifaceted challenges in learning Arabic grammar, stemming from linguistic factors (e.g., the absence of inflection in their mother tongue), cultural factors (e.g., limited Arabic language exposure outside the classroom), and pedagogical factors (e.g., the rigidity of traditional methods).
2. The prescribed curricula in Malaysian institutions vary in their appropriateness, as many rely on textbooks designed for Arab contexts, creating a disconnect between content and learners' actual levels and needs.
3. Teachers -both Malaysian and Arab- require specialized training support, as many lack the pedagogical competence to deliver grammar instruction in a communicative and interactive manner.
4. Malaysian learners display notable weaknesses in the communicative application of grammar due to instruction being limited to theoretical aspects without integration into the four core language skills, thereby hindering natural language acquisition.
5. There is a significant underutilization of educational technology and supporting multimedia, despite the availability of technical resources in some institutions. Grammar is still predominantly taught through traditional methods.
6. The grammar teaching environment in Malaysia requires systematic pedagogical adaptation, including curriculum modification, teacher training, integration of multimedia tools, and contextualizing grammatical rules within real-life situations.

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations:

#### **Educational Institutions**

- Review and revise grammar curricula to align with students' proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds.
- Encourage the use of contextual and interactive teaching approaches.
- Integrate grammar instruction with the four fundamental language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

#### **For Teachers**

- Enhance pedagogical and technical skills through specialized training workshops on teaching Arabic grammar to non-native speakers .
- Adopt diverse instructional strategies, including collaborative learning, language games, and digital applications.
- Focus on the functional and communicative dimensions of grammar, avoiding reliance on purely abstract explanation.

### For Curriculum Designers

- Develop a pedagogical guide tailored to the linguistic and cultural context of Malaysian learners .
- Incorporate real-life scenarios and activities into grammar syllabi to reinforce studied rules .
- Design textbooks that are progressive, simplified, and contextualized, with supportive visual and audio media.

### For Researchers in the Field

- Conduct comparative studies on the effectiveness of various grammar teaching methods for non-native speakers .
- Examine the influence of learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds on their acquisition of Arabic grammar .
- Evaluate the impact of specialized teacher training programs on grammar instruction outcomes.

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