

Student Attitudes in Learning Basic Arabic Language

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ABSTRACT

Arabic language learning opportunities offered by most higher education institutions can be compulsory or elective courses depending on the demands of the university. When studied as an elective course, students will follow it with varying levels of effort based on their own wishes. This study is based on the measurement of student engagement who take basic Arabic as a foreign language course option at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Specifically, this study was conducted to understand student attitudes in learning Arabic courses. The objective of the study is to identify the attitudes possessed by students when they learn Arabic. In addition, the researcher also intends to classify student attitudes with the aim of knowing the student's response. Each item in this aspect of the study will also be described by the researcher to be linked to the performance of student engagement. This study uses a quantitative method by involving 49 UKM students who registered for the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course as a Citra course. An online questionnaire method via Google Forms was used. The study data is the result of a questionnaire instrument adapted into a percentage format. Each learning attitude is assessed as a percentage whether practiced or not. The results of the study found that SKVA 5013 students practiced almost all of the suggested attitudes in question. They showed a positive attitude in learning in addition to implementing an attitude of practicing basic Arabic language skills that coincided with the course structure. Therefore, teachers and coordinators who plan Arabic language teaching at the level of higher education institutions are expected to be able to organize a more conducive academic environment and syllabus so as to successfully achieve all the desired learning goals and produce excellence from the students.

Keywords: attitude, perception, Arabic language, language learning, foreign language

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is a religious language used in the daily lives of the Muslim community in Malaysia. In particular, the Muslim community uses Arabic in their worship routines, which are required of them, namely prayer and supplication. Young children are usually taught about Arabic in the form of pronunciation, reading and memorization. Next, when entering school, these children begin to be exposed to formal and more general Arabic language learning. They begin to recognize Arabic as a unique language that is distinct from the scope of their daily routine memorization and reading. Through the established education system, schools introduce Arabic subjects covering basic grammar and linguistics consisting of phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics in the syllabus. After a certain period of time, when young people continue their education at higher educational institutions, they once again have the opportunity to delve into Arabic formally, even with better scientific methods. They can also learn it by starting at an early stage if they do not have a foundation or any experience in learning Arabic.

Arabic language learning offered in most Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) and Private Higher Education Institutions (IPTS) is usually in stages, starting from the most basic learning to higher language proficiency with the aim of enabling students to apply Arabic in their daily lives.

This study involved students of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who took the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course as a Citra course or elective course. The SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course is one of the foreign language course options offered by the Foreign Language and Translation Unit at the Language and Linguistics Research Centre (PKBL), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK) of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). This course provides exposure to the introduction and basics of the Arabic language, especially those related to the Hijaiyyah letters from the aspect of writing and pronunciation. This course gives priority to non-Muslim students or Muslim students who do not have a foundation in Arabic.

Since this course is not compulsory and is a student's own choice, it can be assumed that the performance of students in this course is different compared to their performance in compulsory or core courses. Student performance may differ because the foreign language study method is different from the student's main field of study method. Performance can be seen, for example, in terms of student involvement, attitude, perception, motivation, and interest. Therefore, this study was conducted to review the attitudes and perceptions of students taking the Arabic language course, especially those taking the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course.

Cakici (2007) in Pham Duc Tuan (2021) stated that from a sociopsychological perspective, the role of attitude is something that needs to be given attention in the language learning process. He also said that the language learning process is easier for students who have a positive attitude towards the language and culture of the native speaker community of the language, while by having an unsatisfactory attitude, student learning will be disrupted. Kudo (1999) also concluded that attitude may play a very important role in language learning where an attitude can influence the success or failure of learning. In addition, Klausmeier (1985) in Pham Duc Tuan (2021) also stated that attitude can influence the extent of learning and also the extent of a student's behavior.

Levels Of Arabic Language Learning

At Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the Arabic language learning course offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities is in stages, with six levels of learning. However, at the time of the study, the learning levels currently being offered are only from the first to the fourth level, namely SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1, SKVA 5023 Arabic Language 2, SKVA 5033 Arabic Language 3 and SKVA 5043 Arabic Language 4. In each semester, the number of students who registered for the four levels exceeded 100. The learning level that is the focus of this study is the first level or basic level, namely SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1.

The SKVA 5013 course is only offered in the first and second semesters for a study session and is not offered in the third semester. Specifically, in the first semester, the number of learning sets or classes opened is three, namely two sets for FSSK students and one set for students from other faculties. Meanwhile, in the second semester, only two sets of classes were opened, one set for FSSK students and one set for other students. The respondents who were used as a sample in this study were from the second semester students group consisting of both sets. In addition, this course also prioritized FSSK students over students from other faculties due to the implementation of the course offer by FSSK itself.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Based on past studies, it can be seen that there is ambiguity in studies of attitude aspects. Typically, language attitude refers to the views held by a person, such as positive or negative language attitudes. Mohammad Fadzeli Jaafar et al. (2012), for example, has examined language attitude as a speaker's view of a language or dialect. Meanwhile, Ahmad Mahmoud Saidat in Mohammad Fadzeli Jaafar et al. (2012) says that researchers in the West tend to connect language attitude with thinking, namely understanding. In conclusion, past researchers who conducted attitude studies have succeeded in obtaining data on language attitudes held by language learners according to the above concept. However, attitude studies should also obtain data from a different angle, namely the students' learning attitudes. This attitude refers to the behavior, actions, responses and reactions of students during language learning classes.

Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the performance of Arabic language learning through both angles, namely perception which refers to students' views and attitude which refers to students' behavior in

learning Arabic. The results of this study are expected to provide different data input compared to language attitude data which mostly fall more into views on a language as obtained by past researchers.

Past studies also did not make basic level Arabic language learning as a subject of study. Most studies conducted focused on the issue of mastery or use of Arabic among students who learn it. Student involvement in terms of learning attitudes and perceptions may differ when compared between initial level studies and mastery and skills levels. This study aims to understand the attitudes and perceptions of students who are beginning to be interested in taking Arabic language courses at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted in the discussion of student performance when learning Arabic, especially both aspects of attitude and perception. Azman Che Mat (2013) studied the perceptions of diploma students from two public higher education institutions towards learning Arabic. Based on a comparative approach, this study examined the similarities and differences found in two different student populations, namely at UiTM Terengganu campus and also at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin.

Research was given to students' opinions on several matters, namely views on the level of difficulty in Arabic, the form of an environment that supports learning, their awareness of the facilities provided for learning and factors for choosing Arabic. The results of the study showed that there were many similarities compared to differences in both student populations. Students at UiTM Terengganu and UnisZA tended to share the same perceptions compared to different perceptions. For example, the students thought that the level of difficulty of Arabic and the level of the syllabus were at a moderate level. Overall, this study focused on the students' views without looking at their behavior during the language learning process.

Hairun Najuwah Jamali and Hanis Najwa Shaharuddin (2019) have conducted a study that focuses on students' perceptions and acceptance of non-verbal learning methods used in Arabic language classes. The results found that students have a moderate perception of the method used. This study looks entirely at the student perception aspect without looking at the student learning attitude aspect related to non-verbal methods. On the other hand, the attitude aspect that is given attention is the attitude of the teaching staff, which involves the use of body language and facial expressions.

In addition, the study of the attitudes and interests of Arabic language students conducted by Ab. Halim Mohamad and Wan Muhamad Wan Sulong (2016) is a comprehensive study of the performance of Arabic language students because it involves three aspects, namely learning attitudes, interests and perceptions. The results of this study show that although the students have a high interest in Arabic, their learning attitudes are not very satisfactory. Regarding the study of attitudes, the students were found to be less exposed to Arabic language materials. The level of use was also found to be low even though they were students majoring in Arabic. In addition, the generally negative aspect of student perceptions was also found to influence the attitude aspect in question. This study focuses more on students majoring in Arabic. The learning attitudes of students who are not majoring in Arabic may be different and need to be studied to ensure that their learning attitudes are also closely related to their perceptions.

Objectives

This study was conducted to fulfill three (3) objectives, namely:

1. Identify the attitudes and perceptions of SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course students in learning.
2. Categorize the attitudes and perceptions of SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course students in learning.
3. Analyze the attitudes and perceptions of SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course students and the influence of both aspects on their learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a quantitative method that emphasizes the percentage of students in attitudes that were done and not done, followed by the percentage of students in perceptions of Arabic language

learning that were agreed and not agreed. This quantitative study used a set of online questionnaire questions as a data collection instrument. Based on a quantitative approach, the study data was measured through numbers, amounts and percentages processed using the Google Forms application.

For the data collection process, the method that was done was by distributing a web link to a group of respondents using the WhatsApp application. This link took respondents to the website for the online questionnaire that had been designed using the Google Forms application. Regarding the questionnaire answering session, respondents were given a suggested response time of around 10-15 minutes. This is important to ensure that respondents can provide direct feedback more sincerely without considering it for too long. The suggested time given is also appropriate for the total number of questions provided. Assistance from the SKVA 5013 course lecturers was also obtained to distribute the web link to the course's WhatsApp group. This is to ensure that all students registered in the course are aware of the study being conducted and can participate in it. The questionnaires filled out and answered by the respondents were then recorded in Google Forms. After that, all the data records obtained were collected and transferred to a different application, namely Google Sheets, to be arranged more systematically.

The data categorization method is done by dividing the collected data based on the objectives and aspects of the study that are to be studied. The categorization includes the demographics of the respondents, the findings of student attitudes, the findings of student perceptions and followed by the findings of student motivation which are additional aspects in this study. This data categorization method also makes it easier for researchers to see and compare the aspects of attitudes and aspects of student perceptions.

At the data analysis stage, a quantitative approach is also used to analyze and describe each data in the form of characteristics found in percentages. Descriptive theory is used to interpret and analyze data. Descriptive analysis aims to provide a descriptive picture of a data. The data obtained in this study is a type of quantitative data that is numerical and statistical. This type of data is usually presented in the form of tables, pie charts and so on along with a division between the aspects of the data that are to be studied. The structural arrangement in this form helps researchers see the entire data input and analyze the data more accurately. Then, the analyzed data is presented according to the amount and percentage.

Next, the researcher describes each data in the form of characteristic findings that represent aspects of the study such as the percentage of attitudes that are often done and not done as well as the percentage of the types of perceptions that are owned and not owned by Arabic language students. The overall results of the analysis will display the amount and percentage needed to achieve the study objectives. Each component in both aspects of student learning attitudes and student perceptions will contain its own percentage in addition to the researcher's views being included.

Forming a Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was used as a research instrument to collect data for this study. The selection of the questionnaire method was made based on the ability of the technique to help researchers obtain data when the study participants or students were not on campus. This questionnaire method also very much coincided with the study objectives which required feedback from the respondents. This questionnaire was designed, prepared and distributed using the Google Forms application. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, namely the respondent's background or demographics, the respondent's learning attitude in learning Arabic, and the respondent's perception of learning Arabic. The form of questions presented in the entire form was a closed question. In addition to the demographic section, all questions in this questionnaire except for four questions in the attitude section contained two response options, namely Yes or No.

The demographic section of the respondent aimed to obtain the respondent's background and basic information. The questions contained in Section A were gender, age, religion, year of study, faculty, center of study and experience of learning Arabic formally. This experience question consisted of answer options of preschool, primary school, secondary school, post-secondary school and also never learning Arabic. The second part, the Attitudes section, contains the main element of the study, namely the identification of students' attitudes throughout learning Arabic. Respondents need to answer this section based on their own experiences and choices. In addition, only in this section there are four questions that contain answer options on a Likert

scale of 1 to 3. The purpose of the options is to obtain feedback on the frequency with which respondents show the attitudes contained in the four questions asked. The third part contains questions about perceptions. The goal of this section is to obtain students' perceptions of learning the SKVA 5013 course, perceptions of Arabic in general, and perceptions of themselves and the teachers who teach.

Respondents

The purposive sampling method was used to select study participants. A total of 49 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia students at the Bachelor's Degree level were involved in providing responses. This study of learning attitudes and student perceptions is also in the form of a focus group. The focus group is a small to medium-sized study sample to represent the population or specific demographic group that is to be studied. The population represented in this study is a group of UKM undergraduate students who registered in the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course. Through the sampling method carried out on the population, the study sample obtained was a total of 49 students registered in semester 2 of the 2022/2023 academic session. The selection of respondents from the students in the course was due to the focus of this study which involves the attitudes and perceptions of students when learning Arabic at the basic level.

The respondents also consisted of students from different faculties, fields, and centers of study. The involvement covered students from the first year to the final year of study. They had different experiences in learning Arabic formally, whether in preschool, primary school, secondary school, after secondary school or also had no experience. The age of the respondents was set from 19 years to 23 years and above. Because registration for the SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 course is not limited to Muslim students only, the religious categories of the respondents were divided into two, namely either Muslim or non-Muslim.

ANALYSIS OF STUDY FINDINGS

The results of this study were handled by obtaining the sum, classification and evaluation. The process of obtaining the sum is based on three parts of the questionnaire, namely the demographics of the respondents, the learning attitudes of the respondents and the perceptions of the respondents. The sum obtained through the questionnaire was then categorized according to attitudes. The attitude section is divided into four;

- Student attitudes during the learning process.
- Student attitudes regarding learning methods.
- Student attitudes regarding Arabic language content.
- Student attitudes regarding basic language skills.

Arabic Language Learning Attitudes

For the first study findings, namely the attitudes of SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 students, there are two attitude statements that were agreed upon by all respondents or students in the learning session being studied. All students with a total of 49 people (100%) agreed that they were able to provide the cooperation needed in carrying out group tasks. At the same time, all 49 students, equivalent to 100% of the respondents, also denied that they quickly felt bored in learning basic Arabic.

In the meantime, the remaining attitudes that were practiced and not practiced by SKVA 5013 Arabic Language 1 students in the Arabic language learning process are as shown in the following charts.

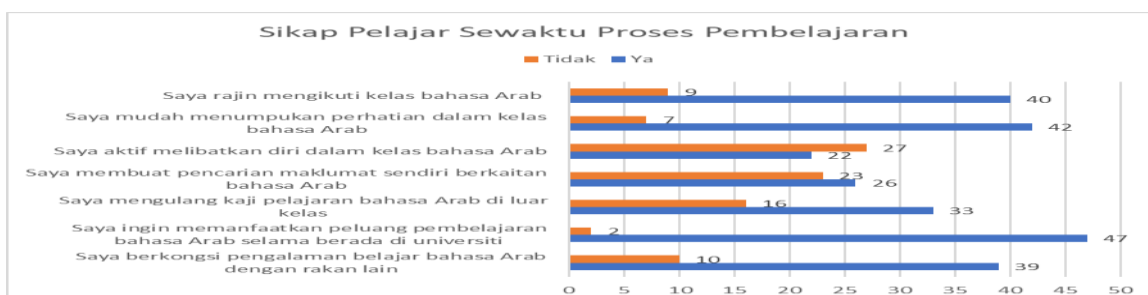


Figure 1 Student Learning Attitudes During the Arabic Language Learning Process

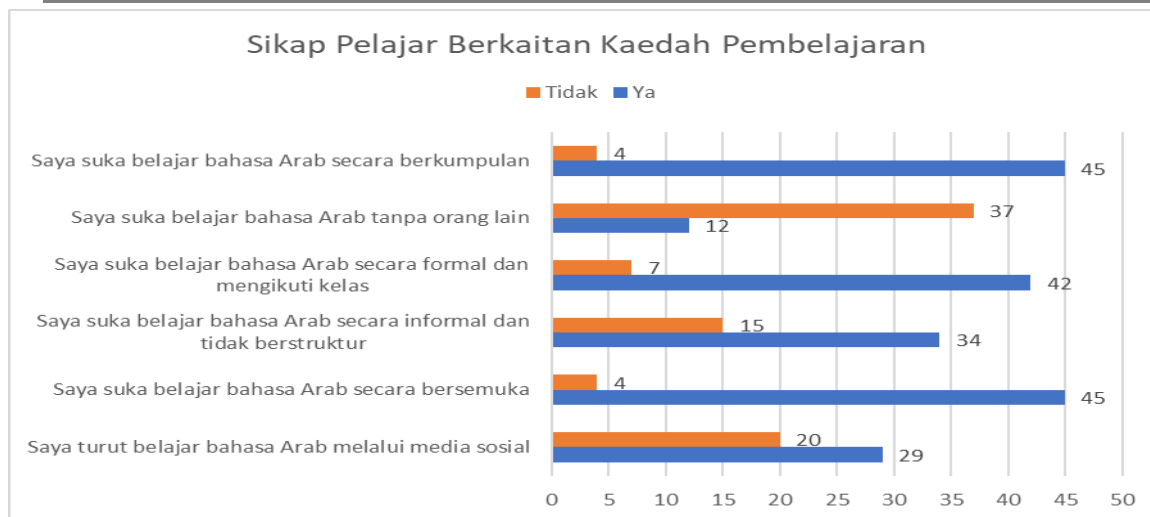


Figure 2 Student Attitudes Regarding Learning Methods

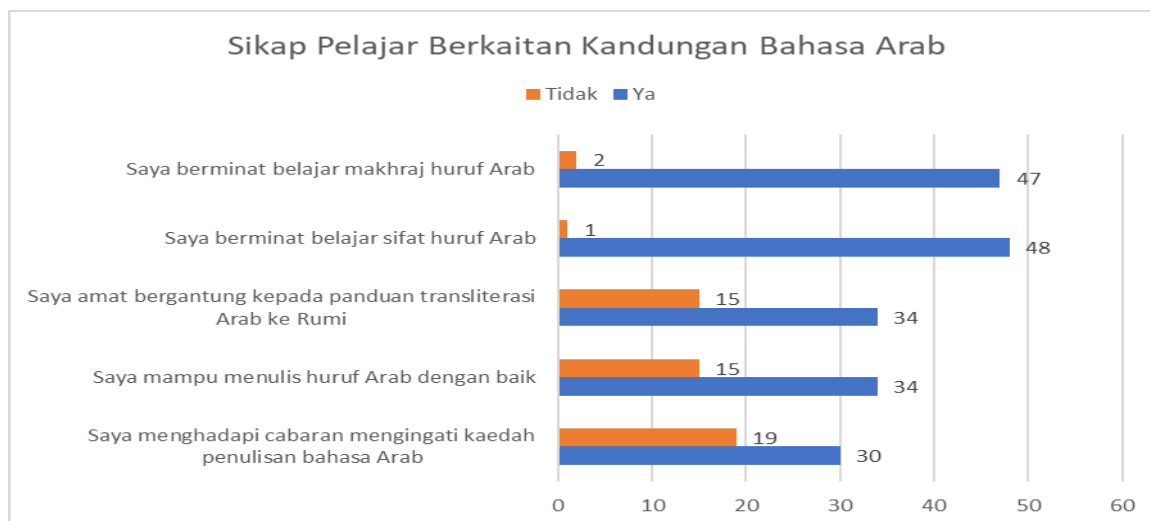


Figure 3 Student Attitudes Regarding Arabic Language Contents

Based on the findings of the study in Figure 1, it shows that 67% of students practice reviewing Arabic lessons outside of class, while 53% of students are involved in searching for additional information. However, only 45% of students are active in class, such as asking questions or participating in presentations, while the rest are less involved. In terms of learning medium, 59% use social media to learn Arabic, and almost all students (92%) prefer face-to-face learning to online.

As for learning methods in Figure 2, 86% of students like formal learning in class, while 69% prefer informal learning. Most students (92%) prefer learning in groups, and only 24% choose individual learning with a teacher. In terms of writing, 69% of students are able to write Arabic letters well, but 61% admit to facing challenges in remembering the writing method.

In addition, Figure 3 states that 69% of students rely on transliteration guides to help their learning. Almost all students showed a high interest in learning the properties and pronunciations of Arabic letters, with 96%-98% endorsing this attitude. A total of 80% of students also shared their Arabic learning experiences with their friends, reflecting a positive attitude towards collaborative learning.

Arabic Language Learning Attitudes Regarding Basic Language Skills

Basic language skills are often used as a standard or assessment measure in the process of learning a language. The four basic language skills are reading, writing, listening and speaking. For this study, speaking skills have been modified to pronunciation skills because the SKVA 5013 course learning only focuses on the alphabet

and lexical level of Arabic. Attitudes about basic skills were asked with a Likert scale response option of 1 (Not Done), 2 (Rarely Done) and 3 (Frequently Done). The findings are shown in the figure below.

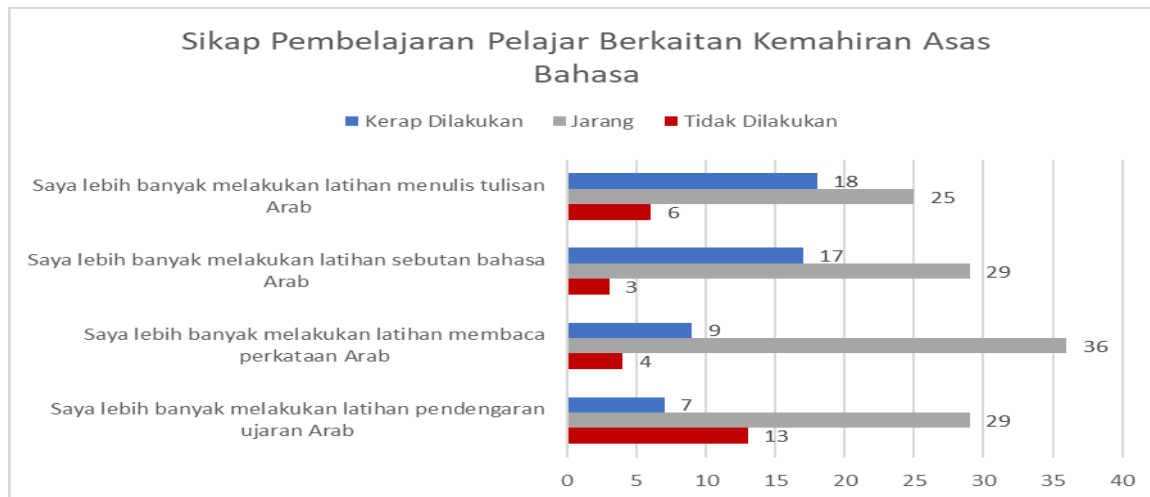


Figure 4 Student Learning Attitudes Related to Basic Language Skills

Figure 4 shows the learning attitudes of SKVA 5013 students related to basic language skills. The focus is on the number of agreements for the frequency of an attitude, whether it is often, rarely or not done. The findings show that the attitude of practicing writing is the attitude most frequently practiced by students with a total of 37% agreement. Some students in this course may train themselves to write Arabic letter combinations consistently. This number is followed by the attitude of practicing pronunciation which is also practiced frequently by 35% of the students. The choice of the frequency of the attitude of practicing writing and the attitude of practicing pronunciation which is more than the frequency of other attitudes is in line with the focus of the SKVA 5013 course. The Arabic Language 1 course provides a syllabus on the pronunciation of letters and how to write basic Arabic. In addition, the attitude that is not practiced at all by students with the highest Likert scale of 1 or Not Done is the attitude of practicing listening. More students do not prioritize listening practice throughout the Arabic language learning process. As for the attitude towards practicing reading Arabic words, the majority, 74% of students, were found to practice it rarely.

CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the attitude towards learning Arabic, especially through learning the SKVA 5013 Arabic 1 course at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The researcher has selected the research data in the form of respondent responses to the online questionnaire. The data grouping was carried out according to one aspect of the study, namely the attitude category before being analyzed one by one. At the final stage of the study, the learning attitude of SKVA 5013 Arabic 1 students can be understood better and more comprehensively.

The researcher can conclude that the attitude of practicing writing is the attitude most frequently practiced by SKVA 5013 Arabic 1 students. Some students in this course may train themselves to write Arabic letter combinations consistently. Then, the data is followed by the attitude of practicing pronunciation which is also practiced by some students regularly. In addition, the attitude that is not practiced at all by students with the highest number of agreements is the listening attitude. More students do not prioritize listening practice throughout the Arabic language learning process.

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