

## A Critical Review Of The Use Of Social Media As A Medium For Arabic Language Learning

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**Abstract** : *This study critically examines the use of social media for Arabic language learning in higher education, highlighting the low motivation as well as the speaking and writing skills of students due to conventional approaches. Using a descriptive qualitative method involving 45 fourth-semester students of the Arabic Language Education study program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, data were obtained through observation, interviews, analysis of social media posts, and open questionnaires. The results show that YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp have great potential as informal learning environments because they provide authentic language input, social interaction, and flexible access, although their use remains sporadic and not systematically integrated into the curriculum. The effectiveness of social media is largely determined by the educator's role as a facilitator, the type of content, and the frequency of meaningful interaction. This study concludes that social media is not merely a technical tool, but a new learning ecology that requires careful pedagogical design, with practical implications including the need to develop a social media-based blended learning model and to enhance digital literacy for both lecturers and students.*

**Keywords** : *Arabic language learning; social media; digital literacy; speaking skill; learning ecology.*

**Abstrak** : *Penelitian ini mengkaji secara kritis penggunaan media sosial untuk pembelajaran bahasa Arab di perguruan tinggi, menyoroti rendahnya motivasi serta keterampilan berbicara dan menulis mahasiswa akibat pendekatan konvensional. Dengan metode kualitatif deskriptif pada 45 mahasiswa semester IV Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab UIN Raden Intan Lampung, data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, analisis unggahan media sosial, dan angket terbuka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa YouTube, Instagram, dan WhatsApp memiliki potensi besar sebagai lingkungan belajar informal karena menyediakan input bahasa autentik, interaksi sosial, dan akses fleksibel, meskipun pemanfaatannya masih sporadis dan belum terintegrasi secara sistematis ke dalam kurikulum. Efektivitas media sosial sangat ditentukan oleh peran pendidik sebagai fasilitator, jenis konten, serta frekuensi interaksi bermakna. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa media sosial bukan sekadar alat bantu teknis, melainkan ruang ekologi belajar baru yang memerlukan desain pedagogis cermat, dengan implikasi praktis berupa perlunya pengembangan model blended learning berbasis media sosial serta peningkatan literasi digital bagi dosen dan mahasiswa.*

**Kata Kunci** : *Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab; media sosial; literasi digital; maharah kalam; ekologi belajar.*

## INTRODUCTION

The digital era has fundamentally transformed the landscape of language education, including the domain of Arabic language learning, which has long been known for its strong pedagogical tradition based on texts and oral modeling. Mastery of Arabic among students at Islamic higher education institutions, particularly within State Islamic Universities (UIN), holds a strategic position not only as a means of communication but also as a key to understanding primary Islamic sources (Wahab, 2018). However, the reality in the field indicates that students' Arabic language skills, especially productive skills (speaking and writing), remain far from expectations. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as 'ājjiz al-lughawī—a functional failure in actively using Arabic despite having undergone several semesters of instruction (Mustafa & Aziz, 2021).

Various diagnostic studies show that the low level of Arabic language proficiency as a second language among Indonesian students is caused by several interrelated factors: (1) the dominance of teaching approaches still oriented toward the grammar-translation method, thus providing insufficient room for authentic communication practice; (2) minimal exposure to Arabic in daily contexts outside the classroom; (3) low intrinsic motivation due to the perception that Arabic is difficult and rigid; and (4) the limited availability of interactive and contextual learning media (Rachman & Lestari, 2022; Hasanah, 2020). These classical challenges are further exacerbated by the characteristics of Generation Z, who have grown up in a digital environment and are more responsive to visual-auditory stimuli and virtual social interaction.

Amid these challenges, social media has emerged as a new space offering tremendous potential for informal language learning. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Telegram are no longer merely means of entertainment or personal communication but have transformed into giant repositories of authentic Arabic content: ranging from short Arabic-language videos with translations, infographics on nahwu-sharaf, Arabic discussion groups, to vlog content featuring daily conversations by native speakers (Alsubaie & Alzahrani, 2021). From the perspective of multimodal learning theory, social media provides text, images, sound, and motion simultaneously, which, according to Mayer (2019), can reduce cognitive load while enhancing retention.

However, the use of social media in Arabic language learning still faces several criticisms and challenges. First, students' use of social media tends to be passive (consumptive)

rather than productive-collaborative (Al-Qahtani, 2020). Second, the authenticity of Arabic content on social media is often questioned due to numerous grammatical errors, code mixing with regional or foreign languages, and dialect variations that confuse beginner learners (Sari & Wijaya, 2023). Third, the absence of pedagogical scaffolding and systematic feedback makes learning interactions less directed (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Mason & Zhang, 2022). Fourth, issues of distraction and time management pose serious problems as the boundary between learning and entertainment becomes blurred (Hootsuite, 2023).

Theoretically, the use of social media in Arabic language learning can be analyzed through several lenses. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input ( $i+1$ ) that is slightly above the learner's proficiency level. Social media, in this case, provides abundant input but not always in a structured manner. Meanwhile, the communicative approach demands meaningful interaction, which in the context of social media can be realized through comment features, direct messages, or live streaming sessions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2020). Mayer's (2019) Multimedia Learning Theory explains that the combination of visual and auditory elements can enhance understanding, but information overload can instead lead to cognitive overload.

Previous research on the effectiveness of digital media in Arabic language learning has yielded mixed findings. For example, a quantitative study by Fauzi & Hidayat (2021) showed that using task-based learning YouTube videos improved speaking skills scores by 34% among PBA students at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. A similar study by Al-Ghamdi (2022) in Saudi Arabia found that lecturer-moderated WhatsApp groups increased students' active participation in Arabic writing practice by 2.5 times compared to conventional classroom discussion forums. However, a study by Hamidah (2023) critically noted that such effectiveness is highly dependent on contextual factors such as students' learning styles, intensity of mentoring, and digital infrastructure.

From the above description, a research gap is evident between the claimed potential of social media and the reality of its implementation in Arabic language learning. Most existing studies are quantitative-experimental in nature, measuring short-term effects, while few have conducted in-depth critical inquiries into how, why, and under what conditions social media truly contributes to holistic foreign language mastery. Furthermore, existing research tends to focus on one specific platform without comparing cross-platform dynamics. Therefore, this

study is formulated to answer three main questions: (1) What are the forms of social media utilization by students and lecturers in Arabic language learning? (2) What factors facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of social media as a medium for Arabic language learning? (3) What optimal pedagogical design should be developed to integrate social media into the Arabic language curriculum?

Based on these problem formulations, this study aims to: (a) critically describe the patterns of social media utilization in Arabic language learning in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung; (b) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors of social media utilization; and (c) formulate a conceptual model for the effective integration of social media into Arabic language learning. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of Arabic language pedagogy in the digital era, particularly in bridging the gap between technological potential and actual learning practices.

## **METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design as articulated by Yin (2018). This approach was chosen because the research aims to achieve an in-depth understanding (thick description) of the phenomenon of social media utilization in its natural context without variable manipulation. A case study allows for the exploration of the complexity of interactions among students, lecturers, content, platforms, and institutional contexts that cannot be measured quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted in the even semester of the 2023/2024 academic year at the Arabic Language Education Study Program (PBA), Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University (UIN) Raden Intan Lampung. The location was selected based on the following considerations: (1) The PBA Study Program at UIN Raden Intan has implemented a blended learning policy with an online portion of up to 40%; (2) Adequate digital infrastructure is available (campus Wi-Fi access, digital language laboratory); (3) Initial observations indicated high usage of social media among students (WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube), yet it has not been pedagogically integrated.

Research subjects were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) active fourth-semester students who had completed courses in *Maharah Kalam* (Speaking Skills) and *Maharah Kitabah* (Writing Skills); (b) having accounts on at least three social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube); (c) willing to participate voluntarily.

A total of 45 students (35 female, 10 male) and 3 lecturers teaching Arabic language courses were involved. For analytical depth, 12 key informants were selected from these 45 students using maximum variation sampling based on their level of social media activity (high, medium, low) and academic achievement (high, medium, low).

The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher themselves (human instrument). However, to maintain systematic data collection, several supporting instruments were developed:

1. **Participatory Observation Sheet:** Developed based on Jewitt's (2017) framework of multimodal interaction analysis, which records types of content (text, images, video, audio), frequency of interaction (comments, likes, shares), and patterns of participation (initiator, respondent, lurker). Observations were conducted in two WhatsApp class groups, students' personal Instagram accounts (with permission), and YouTube channels collectively subscribed to.
2. **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** Developed to explore perceptions, experiences, barriers, and strategies used by students/lecturers. The interview framework covered dimensions such as: frequency of access, purposes of use, favorite content, social interaction, perceived benefits, technical and non-technical constraints, and preferences for curricular integration. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes per informant, were recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.
3. **Digital Documentation:** All posts, comments, and messages in WhatsApp groups as well as students' Instagram posts relevant to Arabic language learning were documented as digital artifacts (anonymized screenshots) for content analysis. Documentation was carried out over 8 consecutive weeks.
4. **Open-Ended Questionnaire:** Administered to 45 students for data triangulation. The questionnaire contained 5 open-ended questions about "most memorable experiences", "main difficulties", "suggestions for lecturers", and "examples of success/failure in using social media for learning Arabic".

Data collection was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1 (Weeks 1-2): Initial observation and introduction. The researcher joined as a passive participant in two WhatsApp class groups (Group A for Maharah Kalam course, Group B for Maharah Kitabah course). The researcher observed communication patterns without intervention. In this phase, key informant recruitment and ethical permissions (informed consent) were also carried out.

Phase 2 (Weeks 3-8): Intensive data collection. Participatory observation was intensified by systematically recording every post and discussion containing elements of Arabic language learning. Interviews were conducted gradually with 6 students in week 3, the remaining 6 students in week 6, and 3 lecturers in week 7. The open-ended questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms in week 4.

Phase 3 (Weeks 9-10): Data verification and member checking. Preliminary analysis results were presented back to 6 key informants to ensure interpretations aligned with the subjects' intentions (member checking). Revisions were made based on feedback.

Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2019), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Specifically:

1. **Data Condensation:** Interview transcripts, field notes, and digital artifacts were reduced by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting raw data. This process was assisted by thematic coding using NVivo 14 software. Coding was performed in two cycles: open coding to identify initial categories, followed by axial coding to connect categories into broader themes.
2. **Data Display:** Data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives, cross-informant comparison matrices, and direct quotations to preserve participant voices. Summary tables of findings were prepared to map the relationships among factors, mechanisms, and outcomes.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Preliminary conclusions were drawn from the beginning of the analysis and verified through: (a) source triangulation (comparing data from student interviews, lecturer interviews, and digital artifacts), (b) method triangulation (observation, interviews, questionnaires), (c) audit trail (recording the

entire analysis process for transparency), and (d) peer debriefing (discussions with two qualitative research colleagues).

To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this research applied: (a) prolonged engagement (8 weeks in the field), (b) persistent observation, (c) comprehensive triangulation, (d) reflexive journaling to manage researcher bias, and (e) external audit by a senior researcher in the field of Arabic language learning.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Description of Results: Patterns of Social Media Utilization**

Based on observations over 8 weeks and analysis of 45 respondents, this study found that all students (100%) used at least one social media platform for activities related to Arabic language learning, whether consciously or unconsciously. Utilization patterns can be classified into three categories:

Category 1: Passive Consumption (68% of students). The majority of students used social media primarily to watch, read, or listen to Arabic content without active production. The most dominant platform was YouTube (96% accessed at least 3 Arabic-language videos per week), followed by Instagram (82% accessed Arabic educational Reels). The most consumed content included: (a) vocabulary translation videos (e.g., the account @arabicwithmaha), (b) Arabic children's songs, (c) short religious lectures by preachers with Arabic text, and (d) Arabic meme content. One informant (F, 20 years old) stated:

"I often watch Arabic videos on YouTube when I'm relaxing, usually the ones with Indonesian and Arabic text right there... But I just watch, never comment or ask questions. Come to think of it, it does add quite a bit to my vocabulary memorization." (W/F/04)

This finding aligns with Al-Qahtani's (2020) research that passive consumption patterns dominate the digital behavior of foreign language learners, especially at the initial stage. However, from the perspective of Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis, passive consumption only provides exposure but does not guarantee intake because there is no mechanism for negotiating meaning.

Category 2: Limited Interaction in Learning Groups (22% of students). Some students were actively involved in lecturer-moderated WhatsApp class groups. Activities included:

sending voice notes practicing reading Arabic texts, responding to lecturer questions about nahwu rules, and sharing links to learning resources. However, productive interactions (asking new questions, providing corrections to peers, or initiating discussion topics) were only carried out by 10% of group members. The common pattern was one-to-many: the lecturer sent materials, students replied with emojis or simply "noted" and "thank you". Lecturer 1 expressed:

"I have tried creating a WhatsApp group for further discussion outside of class. But only the same 3-4 people are active. The rest are 'silent readers.' Yet when I call on them individually in class, they can respond. Maybe they're shy or afraid of making mistakes."\* (W/D1/03)

This finding confirms the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996) that the presence of a platform alone is insufficient; a structured activity design that encourages meaning negotiation is required. The lack of accountability and personal feedback serves as the main inhibiting factor (Mustafa & Aziz, 2021).

Category 3: Creative Content Production (10% of students). Only a small portion of students (5 out of 45) regularly produced Arabic content on public social media (not only in closed groups). Forms of content produced included: (a) bilingual Instagram captions (Indonesian-Arabic), (b) short (30-second) muhadatsah-themed stories, and (c) nahwu meme posts. Their characteristics included high self-confidence, prior participation in student exchange programs to the Middle East, or active involvement in Arabic debate clubs. One informant (M, 22 years old) explained his motivation:

"At first, I just tried making content for fun, casually using Arabic. Turns out many friends asked, 'What does it mean? How can you do that?' From that, I felt more confident. Sometimes I get corrections from followers who happen to be Egyptian or Saudi, which is very helpful." (W/M/09)

This group represents an ideal learning ecology as depicted by sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2020): learning occurs through participation in an authentic community of practice. Unfortunately, their number remains a minority.

#### Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Thematic analysis of interviews and open-ended questionnaires yielded five main supporting factors and four inhibiting factors.

#### Supporting Factors:

1. Accessibility and time flexibility: Social media can be accessed anytime, especially during "dead time" such as waiting for a bus, before sleeping, or during lecture breaks. This reduces psychological burden because learning does not feel formal.
2. Variety of multimodal content: Videos, texts, songs, and images help students with different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) to remain engaged.
3. Existence of virtual communities: WhatsApp study groups, Telegram channels, or YouTube comments provide social support even if minimal. Mutual encouragement or resource sharing was considered important by 70% of respondents.
4. Exposure to authentic (non-constructed) language: Content from native speakers (vlogs, stand-up comedy, lectures) provides vivid language models, including idioms and dialect variations not found in textbooks.
5. Low affective filter: Anonymity and the absence of formal assessment reduce anxiety, making students more willing to experiment with the language (Alsubaie & Alzahrani, 2021).

#### Inhibiting Factors:

1. Distraction and time management: All informants admitted to often being tempted to open entertainment content after intending to study. One student said: "I open YouTube wanting to find nahwu videos, but then get sidetracked watching cooking videos or Korean dramas. Before I know it, I've forgotten my original goal." (A/F/12). This is consistent with the Hootsuite (2023) study which found that the average social media user spends 2.5 hours per day solely on non-educational content.
2. Lack of scaffolding and feedback: In public spaces like Instagram or YouTube, student comments rarely receive responses or corrections. Consequently, the same errors are repeated without improvement.
3. Content credibility and accuracy: Much Arabic language learning content on social media is created by amateurs who are not language experts, thus containing fatal grammatical errors. Beginner students struggle to distinguish right from wrong. One informant complained: "I used to memorize dialogues from TikTok, but when asked by the lecturer, there was a word used in the wrong context. Now I'm hesitant to use just any source." (N/F/18)
4. Dialect gap (fusha vs. 'amiyyah): Fourth-semester PBA students are generally taught fusha Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic), but most popular content on social media uses

Egyptian, Lebanese, or Khaliji dialects. This confusion often leads to fossilization—the solidification of errors due to inconsistent exposure (Sari & Wijaya, 2023).

#### Critical Analysis: Between Potential and Reality

The above data indicate that although social media is promising as an informal learning environment, spontaneous implementation without pedagogical design actually risks reinforcing shallow and unsystematic learning habits. Mayer's (2019) multimedia learning theory teaches the importance of the signaling principle (signaling important information) and segmenting (breaking material into small parts). Yet none of the content consumed by students in this study fulfilled both principles. What occurs instead is cognitive overload because information is presented simultaneously, densely, and without guidance. This explains why the improvement from passive consumption to active competence is very low.

From the perspective of the communicative approach, language learning should emphasize using language for real communication purposes. Social media provides a highly real communication arena. Yet ironically, students use social media more about Arabic (e.g., reading grammar explanations) than with Arabic (discussing, debating, storytelling). In other words, social media has not yet functioned as a communication medium but merely as an information source. This is a fundamental distortion often unnoticed by educators.

This study also found a digital divide in a qualitative sense: not only access but pedagogical digital literacy. Students with high social media literacy (ability to verify sources, manage distractions, produce content) derived greater benefits than those who were merely passive consumers. Ironically, this digital literacy is not explicitly taught in the PBA curriculum. Lecturers also admitted lacking the competence to design structured social media-based learning. Lecturer 3 stated:

"As a senior lecturer, I'm somewhat behind on new platforms. I know WhatsApp and YouTube, but for TikTok or Discord, I don't understand them. So I just leave it to the students. It turns out the results are not optimal." (W/D3/08)

This confession confirms Hamidah's (2023) finding that the success of social media integration is more determined by educator readiness than by technology availability.

#### Comparison with Previous Research

The findings of this study both reinforce and modify previous findings. In line with Fauzi & Hidayat (2021), this study acknowledges the positive effects of social media on motivation and engagement. However, unlike that study which reported significant

improvement in maharah kalam (speaking skills), this study actually found that the greatest improvement occurred in maharah qira'ah (reading captions/comments) and maharah istima' (listening to videos), while active maharah kalam and kitabah (writing skills) did not improve significantly without intentionally designed intervention.

In comparison, the SMMI model developed by Mustafa & Aziz (2021) requires a structured feedback loop component that was not found in the natural setting of this study. Therefore, this study proposes a modification of that model by emphasizing the importance of digital mentoring and peer correction protocols.

Al-Ghamdi (2022) reported that WhatsApp groups could increase the quantity of writing, but this study found that without explicit assessment criteria, quantity does not correlate with quality. In fact, some students tended to send short messages in mixed Arabic (code mixing with Indonesian), which perpetuates inaccuracy.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes four main findings: First, the use of social media in Arabic language learning among PBA students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung remains sporadic, unstructured, and dominated by passive consumption patterns (watching, reading, listening) rather than active production or collaborative interaction. Only 10% of students were involved in regularly producing Arabic content.

Second, social media has great potential as a source of comprehensible input (according to Krashen) and a space for authentic interaction (according to Long), but this potential does not automatically translate into learning outcomes due to the lack of pedagogical scaffolding, systematic feedback, and activity designs oriented toward meaning negotiation.

Third, the main inhibiting factors are digital distraction, lack of pedagogical digital literacy among both lecturers and students, and the absence of content accuracy verification mechanisms. The main supporting factors are access flexibility, low anxiety, and exposure to authentic language.

Fourth, the effectiveness of social media is highly dependent on its integration into a holistic instructional design, not merely being added as an extra activity. Without a change in the lecturer's role from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side" as well as digital mentor, social media will not be able to replace the pedagogical functions of formal classrooms.

## **Practical Implications**

Practically, this study provides recommendations for three stakeholders: For Arabic Language Lecturers:

For Arabic language lecturers: (1) Begin by identifying and verifying social media accounts that provide accurate Arabic content (e.g., educational institution channels or certified native speakers). (2) Design social media-based asynchronous activities that require students to produce content (at least once per week) with clear assessment rubrics. (3) Use poll, quiz, or voice note features to create structured two-way interaction. (4) Enhance digital literacy through training or workshops.

For students: (1) Develop mindful scrolling habits by setting specific goals before opening social media. (2) Join Arabic learning communities that have active moderators and clear discussion rules. (3) Train yourself to be not only a consumer but also a content producer: start with small things like writing bilingual comments or captions. (4) Use save or playlist features to organize learning content by topic.

For media developers and curriculum designers: (1) Develop open educational resources (OER) for Arabic in short content formats (microlearning) that align with multimedia learning principles. (2) Integrate digital literacy for language learning modules into the PBA curriculum. (3) Create content verification standards or credibility badges for Arabic content creators on social media.

## **Research Limitations**

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the scope of the research was limited to one study program at one university, so generalization to other contexts must be done cautiously (transferability depends on contextual similarity). Second, the research took place over 8 weeks, which may not have captured long-term changes or seasonal effects (e.g., during exams or holidays). Third, the use of participatory observation in WhatsApp groups may have altered students' natural behavior (Hawthorne effect), although efforts were made to minimize this. Fourth, this study did not quantitatively measure language competence improvement, so conclusions about "effectiveness" are based on perceptions and behavioral observations.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the above limitations, further research is recommended to: (1) conduct comparative studies across universities (Islamic state universities, general universities, Islamic

boarding schools) to observe contextual variations; (2) develop and test a social media-based blended learning model using mixed methods design (quantitative quasi-experimental and longitudinal qualitative interviews); (3) investigate the role of artificial intelligence (such as chatbots or automatic correction tools) in improving feedback quality on social media; (4) systematically analyze content using corpus linguistics to measure the most common grammatical errors in Arabic content on social media; (5) conduct design-based research to develop a prototype social media platform specifically for Arabic language learning that integrates digital scaffolding.

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