

# A Literature Review on Factors Affecting Motivation for Learning Arabic as a Foreign Language

Xiaoxin Miao<sup>1</sup>, Pucheng Wang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Asian Languages and Cultures, Zhejiang International Studies University, Hangzhou, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Applied Foreign Languages, Zhejiang International Studies University, Hangzhou, China

Email: 1069373102@qq.com, \*p.wang@zisu.edu.cn

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## Abstract

The present literature review examines the factors that impact the motivation for learning Arabic as a foreign language. The review identifies and discusses several key factors that have been explored in recent studies, such as learners' backgrounds and attitudes towards Arabic language and culture, the perceived usefulness of the language, and teaching approaches and teachers' personality. The review suggests the significance of integrating cultural learning components into the curriculum and encouraging learners' appreciation of Arabic language and culture. It also emphasizes the need for instructors to help learners identify practical opportunities to use the language, and explore innovative and diverse teaching techniques, including the use of technology and digital tools. Finally, the review highlights the importance of providing a safe and supportive learning environment, where learners can practice their AFL skills without fear of criticism.

## Keywords

Arabic as a Foreign Language, Learning Motivation, Learners' Attitudes, Teaching Approach

## 1. Introduction

Arabic, spoken by over 400 million people worldwide and used as the language of liturgy for more than a billion Muslims, boasts immense global significance. Its deeply rooted cultural legacy spans thousands of years, and it is the language of the Quran, the holy book of Islam. Moreover, Arabic-speaking countries possess vast reserves of natural resources and have thriving markets. Proficiency in Arabic empowers individuals to tap into these markets, negotiate lucrative deals,

and establish meaningful connections with Arab entrepreneurs, creating a competitive advantage in the global economy. Arabic is also in high demand across various professions, including government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations. Beyond mere communication, its importance extends to the domains of economy, politics, religion, and culture, leading to a notable increase in demand for learning Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL). Many individuals worldwide recognize the relevance of learning Arabic to their personal and professional growth.

Despite its global importance, Arabic can be challenging for non-native speakers to learn due to its complexity. Arabic uses a unique script known as the Arabic alphabet, consisting of 28 letters that can be difficult for those accustomed to the Latin alphabet to learn. The Arabic script is cursive and reads from right to left, which sets it apart from other writing systems, making it more challenging for beginners. Additionally, the language features complex morphological systems and inflections, including a rich system of verb conjugations with up to 19 different forms. Learners must memorize and internalize various verb conjugations and patterns, which can be overwhelming and time-consuming. Arabic also has distinct phonemes, including consonants not present in English such as emphatic consonants and pharyngeal sounds that can be challenging to produce for non-native speakers.

An individual's motivation can be defined as a driving force that influences their behaviour, effort, and persistence towards the achievement of a goal. In the context of language learning, motivation plays a crucial role as it determines the degree of success in language proficiency. Recent studies have demonstrated that the motivations of AFL learners may be impacted by a range of factors, including cultural, social, personal, and academic determinants. As such, the purpose of this literature review is to provide an insight into these factors as well as useful guidance to teachers and educators who desire to enhance the motivation of their students to learn Arabic.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Motivation Theories in Language Learning**

Motivation is a critical factor that significantly affects learners' progress and achievement in their language learning endeavors. One of the earliest motivation theories in the field of language learning is Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model, which proposes that individual variables, including language aptitude and social context, influence a learner's motivation. According to Gardner, learners' attitudes towards the second language and their perception of the learning environment are crucial for their motivation. Learners who hold a positive attitude towards the language and the learning environment are more likely to be motivated to learn. This theory recognizes the importance of the social context and has been extensively applied in studies concerning English as foreign language (EFL) contexts.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is another widely recognized motivation theory. According to SDT, individuals have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that motivate them to engage in activities. In language learning, autonomy refers to the degree of control learners have over their learning process. Competence relates to the learner's perception of their ability to learn the language, while relatedness encompasses the social interaction and support that learners receive from their peers and instructors. Several empirical studies demonstrate that SDT can be instrumental in understanding and enhancing learners' motivation towards language learning. This can be achieved by providing learners with opportunities to exercise autonomy, develop competence, and nurture relatedness with peers and teachers.

In addition to the theories discussed above, several other studies have investigated the impact of diverse factors on motivation in language learning. These factors include a learner's age, gender, and cultural background, which studies have shown can have a significant influence on their motivation. For instance, a study by Dörnyei, Csizér, and Németh (2006) revealed that Hungarian high school students were found to have higher levels of motivation towards learning English compared to German high school students. This study emphasizes the impact of cultural differences on learners' motivation and highlights the need to consider them while designing language learning programs.

Additionally, external factors such as rewards, feedback, and goal-setting have also been found to significantly impact learners' motivation. As indicated by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), students who receive constructive feedback from their teachers or classmates are more likely to sustain their motivation towards language learning. Furthermore, achievable goals and rewards such as grades or certificates can also improve learners' motivation towards learning.

In summary, motivation is a crucial factor impacting learners' success in language learning, and various factors have been identified that can enhance learners' motivation. Gardner's Socio-Educational Model and Deci and Ryan's SDT Model are two prominent theories that have been widely implemented in language learning research. Additionally, cultural background, age, gender, rewards, feedback, and goal-setting are external factors that have been shown to have a significant influence on learners' motivation. Therefore, language teachers must consider these theoretical perspectives and external factors to develop effective language learning programs that can raise learners' motivation and ultimately improve their language proficiency.

## **2.2. Factors Influencing AFL Learning Motivation**

### **2.2.1. Learners' Backgrounds and Attitudes towards Arabic Language and Culture**

Attitudes towards the Arabic language and culture play a significant role in learners' motivation to engage in language learning. A positive attitude towards the language and its associated cultures is more likely to encourage learners to

invest more effort and time in mastering the language. Calafato's (2020) study sheds light on how attitudes may influence motivation towards learning Arabic. According to the study, Norwegian participants were highly motivated to learn the Arabic language for professional and social interaction with Arabic speakers, both at home and abroad. The study further found that learners who expressed strong agreement with Arabic language and culture were more motivated and had more positive attitudes towards learning the language. These findings suggest that fostering a sense of community and belongingness among learners and incorporating cultural knowledge into teaching programs can help in creating positive attitudes towards the language.

The study conducted by Bakar (2010) aimed to evaluate the motivational orientations of 228 students in a tertiary education institution in Malaysia using a questionnaire. The results revealed that the learners' motivational orientations were categorized into intrinsic motivation-knowledge, intrinsic motivation-accomplishment, extrinsic motivation-identified regulation, amotivation, and religious motivation, with religious motivation emerging as a new sub-dimension. In another study conducted by Husseinali (2006), significant differences about the initial motivation of AFL learners were found between those of Arab and Muslim heritage and those of other heritage backgrounds. Data was collected using a survey and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. However, the study suggests viewing the diversity of cultural backgrounds and proficiency levels among AFL learners as a strength rather than a weakness. To keep learners motivated, different content should be offered to different groups of learners, particularly heritage learners who may benefit from courses that address their identification needs.

### **2.2.2. Learners' Perceived Usefulness of Arabic Language**

The perceived usefulness of Arabic language may significantly affect students' motivation to learn the language. Students who view Arabic as a beneficial language that can enhance their personal or professional opportunities are more likely to be motivated to learn the language. Aladdin's (2010) study revealed important insights into this issue. The study used a questionnaire with 48 items to collect quantitative data on non-Muslim Malaysian learners' attitudes and motivations towards learning Arabic as a foreign language. The findings showed that the respondents were primarily motivated to learn Arabic for instrumental reasons, such as fulfilling university requirements. These respondents also showed significant intrinsic and integrative motivations to learn Arabic, demonstrating a sincere desire to engage with the language for personal and social reasons.

Calafato and Tang (2019) investigated the motivational self-concepts of 114 non-Arab expatriate teenagers in the UAE who were learning English, Arabic, and sometimes an additional foreign language simultaneously, using the L2 Motivational Self System framework. The study's findings showed that participants primarily approached the study of Arabic in functional terms, with little interest

in the language's culture or media. However, the study also found that competitiveness had a positive relationship with multilingual motivation, suggesting that students who were more competitive were more motivated to learn multiple languages.

Ajape et al. (2015) utilized a questionnaire based on Gardner's attitude motivation test battery to evaluate the students' integrativeness, attitude towards the learning situation, motivation, and instrumentality. The study revealed that the students held a favorable view of studying Arabic and a strong sense of integrativeness. However, their motivation and instrumentality were low due to the perceived lack of career prospects in this field. These findings infer the need to revise the undergraduate Arabic curriculum to equip students with more practical skills and future-oriented career prospects to enhance their motivation and instrumentality. By providing more career-focused prospects in the Arabic language field, students are more likely to be motivated to learn. Moreover, establishing a practical learning environment where students can utilize their newly acquired language skills may improve their overall learning experience and enhance their motivation.

### 2.2.3. Teaching Approach and Teachers' Personality

Several studies have explored the impact of various teaching approaches on the motivation of Arabic language learners. In one study by Donitsa-Schmidt et al. (2014), the authors aimed to investigate whether modifications in the way Arabic is taught as a second language in Israeli schools affect the attitudes and motivation of students toward learning Arabic. The changes implemented included the teaching of spoken Arabic and initiating instruction at a younger age. The results indicated that students who learned spoken Arabic exhibited more positive attitudes towards the language, culture, and speakers, in addition to higher levels of motivation to learn. This highlights the importance of developing robust educational programs and curricula that cater to the teaching of the Arabic language.

Another study conducted by Husseinali (2004) showed that students' motivation and language achievement were significantly better when the learning process aligns with their language goals, particularly given the relative difficulty of the Arabic language compared to other foreign languages. However, the source of students' learning experience heavily relies on their teachers. Lorenza (2022) investigated how teachers at the Muhammadiyah Education Center in Cambodia can enhance students' motivation and suggested four key steps. These steps include instilling a sense of understanding and appreciation for the value of Arabic and Islam, selecting suitable learning methods and educational materials, ensuring that complete facilities and infrastructure are in place, and conducting assessments to gauge progress. The study emphasized the need for Arabic and Islamic teachers to exert their best efforts in promoting students' motivation to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Likewise, Fauzi (2021) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the

Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS) model in enhancing Arabic language learning for novice students. The study was conducted in two cycles with 39 students enrolled in two classes, and data were collected through performance grading rubrics and assessments. The study revealed a notable progress in both motivation and Arabic speaking skills of the students. It also indicated that the ARCS model was effective in addressing the needs of good motivation among novice students in this course.

Some other studies have delved into the impact of technology-based learning tools on the motivation of Arabic language learners. For instance, [Eltahir et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of game-based learning (GBL) in improving motivation, engagement, and academic performance in an Arabic language grammar course. The study compared an empiric group (n = 54) that received GBL via Kahoot! and a control group (n = 53) that received traditional instruction. The findings revealed that the empiric group demonstrated improved knowledge and higher motivation compared to the control group, highlighting the potential advantages of GBL as a tool for enhancing motivation, engagement, and academic performance. It is also worth noting that the role of technology in shaping the learning environment of Arabic language learners should not be underestimated. For instance, the widespread use of social media has been known to influence Arabic language learning.

[Di Xuan et al. \(2020\)](#) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between the usage of social media (SMU), motivation, and language learning among 317 Arabic learners at six universities. The researchers employed a quantitative survey using questionnaires and analyzed the data using SPSS and SmartPLS. The results indicated a significant correlation between SMU and motivation, which varied based on the year of study. Similarly, [Yasin et al. \(2021\)](#) evaluated the effectiveness of using multimedia tools in Arabic language learning to improve students' motivation. The study involved two groups of eighth-grade students, with one group being taught with multimedia tools such as PowerPoint, while the other group was taught without multimedia tools. The findings from the study demonstrated that using multimedia tools significantly enhanced students' learning motivation. Based on these results, the study suggested that Arabic language teachers should consider using multimedia tools to enhance students' motivation in language learning.

[Anggaraini et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted a research study to examine the impact of teacher personalities on motivating students to learn Arabic, expanding on the previous studies that focused on teaching strategies and media. The researchers employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) approach and a framework of five professional teacher personalities. The study identified five important personality traits that educators should possess to positively impact the learning interaction between educators and students and enhance students' motivation to learn Arabic. The identified traits include a steady and stable personality, maturity, prudence, wisdom, authoritative yet polite personality, and noble character. These personalities traits provide a founda-

tion and a framework for Arabic language teachers to help them understand how they can cultivate stronger bonds with their students and motivate them to learn effectively. Findings suggest that the presence of these personality traits can make the learning experience more enjoyable, engaging and the teachers more authoritative to pursue the objectives.

### 3. Conclusion

#### 3.1. Current Situation and Implications

In summary, this literature review suggests that a range of factors may positively or negatively impact learners' motivation and ultimately their success in acquiring proficiency in Arabic as a Foreign Language. By understanding and addressing these factors, instructors can effectively stimulate and sustain learners' motivation, thus facilitating their language acquisition process.

One critical factor that emerges from the literature is learners' backgrounds and attitudes towards Arabic language and culture. Many non-native learners of Arabic may have preconceptions or stereotypes about Arabic culture and the Arab world, which can negatively impact their motivation to learn the language. Instructors can address this issue by integrating cultural learning components into their curriculum. By immersing learners in authentic cultural practices, they can develop a deeper appreciation of the richness and complexity of the Arabic language and culture, which can ultimately improve their language learning experience. In addition, incorporating learning content about cultural understanding can contribute to learners' intercultural competence, enabling them to interact more effectively in diverse cultural contexts, including the Arabic-speaking world.

Another factor that influences learners' motivation is the perceived usefulness of Arabic language. Learners are more likely to engage in learning Arabic if they believe that it will help them achieve their goals, whether personal or professional. Instructors can play a vital role in this by highlighting the practical applications of the language and demonstrating how it can be used in real-life scenarios. For example, instructors can introduce learners to industries in which Arabic is in high demand, such as international business, government, or media. They can also provide learners with opportunities to practice the language in a variety of settings, such as role-playing exercises or real-world scenarios. By emphasizing the practical relevance of Arabic, instructors can motivate learners to engage more deeply with the language and develop a greater sense of ownership and investment in their learning journey.

Teaching approaches, use of technology, and teachers' personality and behavior are other key factors that may impact learners' motivation. Instructors should be creative and flexible in their teaching methods to keep learners engaged and motivated. They can draw upon a variety of techniques, such as group discussions and multimedia resources, to create a dynamic and stimulating learning environment. The use of technology, such as online resources, language learn-

ing apps, and digital tools, can also be beneficial in providing learners with interactive and engaging learning experiences. Instructors should exhibit positive attitudes towards learners and their progress in learning Arabic. They should be empathic to learners' needs and use positive reinforcement to encourage and motivate them. A positive and supportive learning environment is also crucial for learners to feel safe and comfortable practicing their Arabic skills. Instructors can create a safe space by encouraging learners to ask questions, share their ideas, and make mistakes without fear of judgment.

### 3.2. Future Trends

Future research can expand on the findings presented in this literature review by conducting a more in-depth exploration of effective strategies for promoting the motivation of AFL learners. For instance, studies could explore how instructors can effectively address learners' negative attitudes towards Arabic and encourage learners to develop a more positive view of the language. Furthermore, future research can investigate the impact of learners' perceived usefulness of Arabic language in different contexts, such as in academic, professional, or personal settings. Studies could examine how learners' perceptions of the language's relevance and applicability affect their motivation and engagement, and how instructors can effectively highlight the practical applications of the language to enhance learners' motivation.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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