International Review of Humanities Studies

Volume 8 | Number 1

Article 14

1-31-2023

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Recommended Citation

Manurung, Catherine and Letmiros, Letmiros (2023) "FACTORS AFFECTING NON-MUSLIM STUDENTS OF FACULTY OF HUMANITIES OF UNIVERSITAS INDONESIA TOWARDS ARABIC," International Review of Humanities Studies: Vol. 8: No. 1, Article 14.

DOI: 10.7454/irhs.v8i1.1013

Available at: https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs/vol8/iss1/14

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<u>www.irhs.ui.ac.id</u>, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416 Vol. 8, No.1, January 2023, pp. 170-181

Received: September 2022, Reviewed: October 2022, Accepted: January 2023

FACTORS AFFECTING NON-MUSLIM STUDENTS OF FACULTY OF HUMANITIES OF UNIVERSITAS INDONESIA TOWARDS ARABIC

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ABSTRACT

Arabic is a foreign language commonly spoken by many people all over the world; moreover, internationally, it plays such a strategic role. Nevertheless, Indonesian non-Muslims have a relatively low interest in Arabic. We can observe it from the relatively low number of non-Muslims who major in Arabic literature in various universities all over Indonesia. Therefore, this is such an interesting phenomenon to be studied. We think that this phenomenon takes place due to their inappropriate or incorrect perceptions towards Arabic. This study is aimed at identifying various factors affecting the perception of non-Muslim students of Faculty of Humanities of Universitas Indonesia (FIB-UI) in the Class of 2020 towards Arabic. This study employs a quantitative method with a descriptive approach. The participants in this study are non-Muslim students of Faculty of Cultural Sciences of Universitas Indonesia (FIB-UI) in the Class of 2020 with the samples amounting to 53 persons. To process the data of the study, we employ an exploratory factor analysis method. Based on the results of the study, it is found out that there are 5 factors affecting their perceptions such as the introduction factor, the Arabic characteristic factor, the assessment/assumption factor, the language-as-a-religious-identity factor, and the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor.

KEYWORDS: perceptions, non-Muslim students, Arabic, Factor

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the most popular and studied foreign language in Indonesia (AnakUI.com). Yahya, et al (2020) stated that the most dominant driving force for Indonesian people to learn Arabic was a religious factor. They studied it since they would like to understand and go deep into the Holy Quran, the Hadith, and various Islamic books written in Arabic. Other than that factor, Yahya, et al also mentioned some other factors such as the academic factor, the professional factor,

and the economic factor.

Letmiros (2019) added that, besides those factors mentioned above by Yahya, there were some other factors. First, the fact that many Arabic words such as *abadi*, *aman*, *amal*, *amanah*, *awal*, *akhir*, *kitab*, *hadir*, *hakim*, *hamil*, *rakyat*, *musyawarah*, *yakin*, *qalbu*, and so on had been borrowed in Indonesian language. Second, Arabic had become an official language at the United Nations since 1973. Third, Arabic was one of the three old languages in the world with the other two being Latin and Sanskrit; moreover, the number of Latin and Sanskrit speakers got smaller from time to time, while the number of Arabic speakers got bigger from time to time. Fourth, Arabic literature was of high quality in regards to both its proses and poetry. Fifth, many Indonesian expatriates living in those 22 Arab countries worked or studied Islamic sciences and Arabic.

Speaking Arabic can give you such advantages in today's globalization era since Arabic plays such a crucial role in the global community. Arabic is the mother tongue of the people in 22 countries. Accounting for 3.6% (279 million), Arabic is the sixth most spoken language in the world after English, Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, and French. Moreover, Arabic serves as the religious language of the Muslims accounting for 24.9% of the world population living all over the world (The World Factbook, 2021). Besides, in December 1973, the United Nations stipulated Arabic as one of its six official languages used in various international forums. The five other languages are English, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and French (UNESCO, 2012).

Muslims in Indonesia use Arabic in their daily religious activities. Those activities can take place in public places such as *Azan*, prayers, and Holy Quran recitals at schools, office buildings, and so on. Of those various activities, it is predicted that at least most of the Indonesian people including the non-Muslims have heard of, see, and interact with Arabic in their daily life. Therefore, it is safe for us to say that some Indonesian non-Muslims are no stranger to Arabic. Thus, they can at least be interested in learning Arabic.

That non-Muslims lack interests in Arabic is obvious. Several studies have confirmed it. For instance, in their study on "Non-Muslim Students' Attitudes towards Malay Arabic subject at SDN 016 in the Regency of Kampar", Wahyuni, et al (2011) stated that 33.59% of non-Muslim students showed a non-positive attitude towards the Malay Arabic subject due to, among others, their lack of exposure to Arabic compared to their fellow Muslim students who had learned Arabic through reciting the Holy Quran. Therefore, those non-Muslim students experienced difficulty and lagged behind in understanding those Malay Arabic scripts. Another factor affecting their lack of interests was the fact that they were not really interested in learning that Malay Arabic subject since they thought that the subject was especially dedicated to the Muslim students.

Moreover, in their study on "Desacralization in the Arabic Learning in Indonesia: An Analysis on the Language as a Religious Identity", Yahya, et al (2020) elaborated international non-Muslims' level of interests in Arabic and the Arabs' culture. Through a program named *Arabic for Non-Native Speaker* at Qatar University in the 2019-2020 school year, non-Muslim participants from all over the world accounted for 27% of the total participants. The fact proved that, actually, non-Muslims were quite interested in learning Arabic and the Arabs' culture. Unfortunately, that was not the case in Indonesia. It was mentioned that there were some stereotypes of the Muslims in the non-Muslim communities, and those stereotypes made Arabic not inclusive to the Indonesian non-Muslims. To a certain extent, the religious factor generated a strong Muslims' sacralization attitude, so Arabic, in turn, became exclusive. Arabic's main function as a means of communication was eclipsed by its function as a religious identity. Hence, Arabic lost its strategic position as a language capable of being learned by everybody.

One indicator was obvious; very few senior high school non-Muslim students were interested in majoring in Arabic literature after they graduate. For instance, at Universitas

Indonesia, there was only one non-Muslim female student majoring in Arabic literature. Similar things certainly happened in other universities. Only Muslim students majored in Arabic literature.

Based on the facts mentioned above, we know that there were some Indonesian non-Muslims' inaccurate perceptions towards Arabic. Hence, this study was aimed at analyzing what non-Muslims' perceptions toward Arabic were and at identifying the factors affecting those perceptions.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Perceptions

Sugihartono (2007:8) stated that a perception was the brain's ability to interpret or implement a stimulus. That implemented stimulus would generate a positive or negative input, which would in turn affect one's action towards it. Rakhmat (2005) thought that a perception was a conclusion of information or an interpretation to a message in one's observation process on an object, an event or its obtained relations. It meant that at every situation that one experienced, there would always be the process of a meaning taking. Not only did that process necessarily include a stimulus, but it also included one's interest, determination, and memory. Moreover, Solomon elaborated that a perception was a process of obtaining a sensation which would then be sorted out, selected, arranged, and interpreted. (Prasetijo & Ihallauw, 2005:67).

Furthermore, Walgito (2010: 53) stated that a perception was one's impression on a certain object resulting from the process of a stimulus sensing, organization, and interpretation that would in turn become something meaningful. Robbins (2003) said that a perception was an impression that one received through his or her five senses which would then be analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated in order to generate a meaning.

Based on those definitions mentioned above, we conclude that a perception is one's impression or thought resulting from the the sensing, organization, implementation, and evaluation process of a stimulus obtained through one's five senses. All of the sub-systems in one's brain are related to one another, so the obtained stimulus can be processed regularly and structurally from one system to another system. In this process, a person sorts out and selects any useful stimuli. Then, he or she makes a decision on which appropriate action or response he or she will take.

Factors Affecting a Perception

A perception takes place very quickly in a person. At first, the absorbed stimulus flows to one's brain. Then, it undergoes the process of a psychological and meaning taking. During the process, the results of the meaning will be affected by one's external and internal factors. These factors are the reasons behind why each person has a different perception over the same object. Walgito stated that the factors affecting one's perception were a perceived object or a stimulus, one's five senses or receptors and attention themselves. Having a different opinion, Prasetijo (Prasetijo & Ihallauw, 2005) said that one's perception would be affected by several internal and external factors. The internal factors included experience, need, assessment, and expectation/hope, while the external factors included outer look, characteristic of the stimulus, and environmental situation.

As mentioned above by Prasetijo, there were several factors affecting a perception such as internal factors which included experience, need, assessment, and expectation/hope and external factors which included outer look, characteristic of the stimulus, and environmental situation. Based on the results of several previous studies having been mentioned above, we choose a

religious identity factor as one of the factors affecting the non-Muslims' perception towards Arabic (Yahya, et al, 2020).

Below are statements used as an indicator of various factors affecting the non-Muslim students' perception towards Arabic.

Experience

- 1. I have learned Arabic (at least up to the introduction of Arabic letters).
- 2. I have ever listened to some daily Arabic conversations (Not a memorized Arabic expression or an Islamic prayer).

Assessment

- 1. Saudi Arabia is the only country stipulating Arabic as its official state language.
- 2. I think there are only few Arabic speakers from all over the world.

Needs

- 1. I think that Arabic is not much required in the professional or the working life.
- 2. One's good command of Arabic does not really benefit him or her as much as his or her good command of English.
- 3. In the working life, a corporation does not really look for a person with good command of Arabic, but a person with good command of English and Mandarin.

Characteristics

- 1. As far as I am concerned, all Arabic scripts should be pronounced like the sound of *Azan* or an Islamic prayer.
- 2. All Arabic scripts contain verses and scripts of Islam.
- 3. I agree with those who say that Arabic is the most difficult language in the world.
- 4. It is difficult for me to learn Arabic since it uses non-Latin letters (Latin letters = A-Z alphabets).

Religious Identity

- 1. It is impossible for me to learn Arabic since it is exclusively used by Muslims.
- 2. That Arabic identic to Islam is one of the main reasons why many non-Muslims are not interested in learning Arabic.
- 3. I must not use Arabic (in various atributes such as clothing items, paintings, pictures, and so on) indiscriminately since that action will offend the Muslims..
- 4. Arabic is made sacred by the Muslims, so it can only be used in Islamic religious events.
- 5. A non-Muslim was once deemed to insult Islam since he or she said/used some Arabic words in the mass media. If I did the same thing, it would be highly likely for me to get a similar fate.

Environmental Situation

- 1. My family does not allow me to say general Arabic terms usually said by Muslims such as *bismillah, alhamdulillah, assalamualaikum*, and so on in my daily life.
- 2. It seems to me that the people around me would think that I am going to convert to Islam if I start learning Arabic.

METHODS OF THE STUDY

Methods of the Study

This study employed a quantitative method with a descriptive type. A quantitative method is employed to do a research on a certain population or sample, to collect the data by using some research instruments with the analysis of the data being quantitative/statistical aimed at examining an established hypothesis (Sugiyono, 2017: 8). A descriptive analysis is used to analyze the data by describing the obtained data. This study employed a factor analysis method on the variables serving as the factors affecting non-Muslims' perception towards Arabic.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were non-Muslim college students studying at a university and majoring in any study programs having nothing to do with Arabic literature major. We selected the premises of Faculty of Humanities of Universitas Indonesia (FIB-UI) as a place to distribute the questionnaires of our study. We selected FIB-UI in order to obtain the respondents of the study most of whom were interested in a certain language.

Methods of the Data Collection

The data used in this study consists of the primary data and the secondary data.

1. The Primary Data

The data were collected by distributing the questionnaires of our study to the respondents. The questionnaire contained 16 statement items in relations to the topic of the study. Every statement was arranged in the Google Form application and distributed to the respondents through an instant messenger application, namely Line. During the process, we did not directly interact with them; we simply communicated with them through a social media application. The tool used to collect the data was a closed questionnaire with the choices of answers being 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. The respondents filled out the questionnaires independently, so we had arranged the statement as clearly as possible in order not to confuse them.

2. The Secondary Data

The secondary data were collected through various literature reviews to identify the forms and items that we used when making the questionnaire. Then, by employing various experts' opinions to select the factors related to the non-Muslim students' towards Arabic. After the factors had been determined, the indicators in each factor were included in the questionnaire randomly arranged. Then, we distribute the questionnaires to the respondents and obtained the results of the examination.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Data Analysis

1. Respondents' Characteristics

All of the respondents in this study were non-Muslim students of FIB UI in the Class of 2020. The number of the samples obtained until the examination was analyzed was 53 samples.

The students serving as the respondents were then categorized into their sexes and religions (non-Muslims) presented in a table.

Based on their sexes, the number of male respondents was 22 respondents, and the number of female respondents was 31 respondents. Meanwhile, based on their religions (according to their ID cards), the number of Christian participants was 34 participants, the number of Catholic participants was 9 participants, the number of Buddhist participants was 8 participants, the number of Hindu participants was 2 participants, and none of the participants was Confucians.

| No | Sex | Number | Percentage |
|----|--------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Male | 22 | 58.50% |
| 2 | Female | 31 | 41.50% |
| | Total | 53 | 100% |

Table 1: Characteristics of the respondents based on their sexes

| No | Religion | Number | Percentage |
|----|--------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Christianity | 34 | 64.20% |
| 2 | Catholicism | 9 | 17.00% |
| 3 | Buddhism | 8 | 15.10% |
| 4 | Hinduism | 2 | 3.80% |
| 5 | Confucius | 0 | 0% |
| | Total | 53 | 100% |

Table 2: Characteristics of the respondents based on their religions (non-Muslims).

2. Analysis of the Respondents' Knowledge on the Studied Object

In the second part of the questionnaire of the study, two statements were presented to the respondents to measure how well their knowledge on Arabic was.

Saya pernah belajar bahasa Arab (setidaknya sampai pengenalan huruf Arab). ⁵³ jawaban

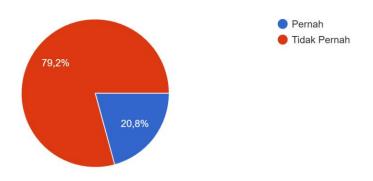


Figure 1: Experience indicator chart 1.

As for the first statement, 79.2% of the respondents or 42 respondents had never learned Arabic at all, while 20.8% of the respondents or 11 respondents had learned Arabic at least up to the introduction of Arabic letters.

Saya pernah mendengar percakapan bahasa Arab sehari-hari (bukan bahasa Arab dalam hafalan atau doa agama Islam).



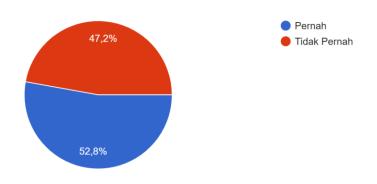


Figure 2: Experience indicator chart 2.

As for the second statement, 47.2% of the respondents or 25 respondents admitted that they had never listened to any daily Arabic conversations (not a memorized Arabic expression or an Islamic prayer, while 52.8% of the respondents or 28 respondents admitted that they had heard some daily Arabic conversations.

Based on the results of those two questionnaire statement items, we drew three conclusions in regards to how well the respondents' knowledge of Arabic was. First, almost half of the respondents of this study did not know Arabic at all based on the fact that they had never learned Arabic and listened to any daily Arabic conversations. Second, a quarter of the respondents of this study at least knew Arabic but in such a low level based on the fact that they had ever listened to

some daily Arabic conversations but had never learned Arabic. Third, a fifth of the respondents of this study understood what Arabic was like quite well based on the fact that they had learned Arabic up to the introduction of Arabic letters and that they had listened to some daily Arabic conversations.

3. Analysis of the Students' Perception Factors towards Arabic

The examination used a factor analysis to obtain the answers to the question of this study, namely what factors shape the non-Muslims' perception towards Arabic? The variables employed in this study included the assessment, characteristic, media information, and environment variables. Each of the variables had at least more than one statement, so there were 16 statements found in the instrument of this study.

Factor 1

| Factor Indicator | Score | |
|--|-------|------------------------------------|
| It is impossible for me to learn Arabic since Arabic is exclusively used by Muslims (i6) (religious identity_1) | 240 | A nobi o |
| As far as I am concerned, all Arabic scripts should be pronounced like the sound of <i>Azan</i> or an Islamic prayer (i8) (characteristic_1) | 204 | Arabic Characteristic Factor |
| All Arabic scripts contain verses and scripts of Islam (i13) (characteristic_2) | 238 | ractor |
| Total | 682 | |

Factor 1 consists of religious identity_1 (0,618), characteristic_1 (0,835) and characteristic_2 variables. This factor is named the Arabic characteristic factor.

- Ideal answer score = the highest score x the number of questions x samples $= 5 \times 3 \times 53 = 795$
 - = Score / ideal answer score x 100
 - Index Formula % $= 682 / 795 \times 100 = 85.7\%$ (positive)

Factor 2

| Factor Indicator | Score | |
|---|-------|---------------|
| I think that good command of Arabic is not much required in | 182 | |
| the professional or the working life. (i1) (need_1) | 162 | |
| Saudi Arabia is the only country stipulating Arabic as its | 201 | Assessment/as |
| official state language. (i12) (assessment_1) | 201 | sumption |
| It seems to me that the people around me will think that I am | | Factors |
| going to convert to Islam if I start learning Arabic. (i16) | 153 | |
| (environmental situation _2) | | |
| Total | 536 | |

Factor 2 consists of need_1 (0.688), assessment_1 (0.739), and environmental situation_2 (0.733) variables. This factor is named the assessment/assumption factor.

• Ideal answer score = the highest score x the number of questions x samples

$$= 5 \times 3 \times 53 = 795$$

• Index Formula % = Score / ideal answer score x 100 = 536 / 795 x 100 = 67.4% (neutral/so-so)

Factor 3

| Factor Indicator | Score | |
|--|-------|--------------------|
| I agree with those who say that Arabic is the most difficult | | |
| language in the world. (i2) (characteristic_3) | 155 | Religious identity |
| Arabic is made sacred by the Muslims, so it can only be | 230 | |
| used in Islamic religious events (i4) (religious identity_4) | 230 | |
| My family does not allow me to say general Arabic | | factor |
| expressions usually said by the Muslims such as | 217 | 1401 |
| bismillah, alhamdulillah, assalamualaikum, and so on in | 217 | |
| my daily life (i10) (environmental situation_2) | | |
| Total | 602 | |

Factor 3 consists of characteristic_3 (0,572), religious identity_4 (0,632), and environmental situation_2 (0,738) variables. This factor is named the environmental situation factor.

- Ideal answer score = the highest score x the number of questions x samples
 - $= 5 \times 3 \times 53 = 795$
- Index Formula % = Score / ideal answer score x 100

$= 602 / 795 \times 100 = 75.7\%$ (neutral/so-so)

Factor 4

| Factor Indicator | Score | |
|--|-------|-------------------------|
| A non-Muslim was once deemed to insult Islam since he or she said/used some Arabic word in a mass media. If I did the same thing, it would be highly likely for me to get a similar fate. (i9) (religious identity_5) | 161 | Stereotypes- of-the- |
| I am not allowed to use Arabic (in various atributes such as clothing items, paintings, pictures, and so on) indiscriminately since that action will offend the Muslims (i15) (religious identity_3) | 137 | Muslims Factor |
| Total | 298 | |

Factor 4 consists of religious identity_4 and religious identity_3 variables. This factor is named the language-as-a-religious-identity factor.

- Ideal answer score = the highest score x the number of questions x samples
 - $= 5 \times 2 \times 53 = 530$
- Index Formula % = Score / ideal answer score x 100
 - $= 298 / 530 \times 100 = 56.2\%$ (negative)

DISCUSSION

There were 6 factors affecting the non-Muslim students' perception towards Arabic such as introduction, assessment/assumption, need, characteristic, language as a religious identity, and environmental situation. Moreover, we also conducted an exploratory factor analysis to all of those factors except for the introduction factor into 4 factors, so, in total, there were 5 factors in this study.

Factor 1: Arabic Characteristics affect the non-Muslim students' perception towards Arabic.

Factor 1 consisted of three statement indicators namely "It is impossible for me to learn Arabic since Arabic is exclusively used by Muslims", "As far as I am concerned, all Arabic scripts should be pronounced like the sound of *Azan* or an Islamic prayer", and "All Arabic scripts contain verses and writings of Islam". The factor based on those three indicators was named the Arabic characteristic factor. Based on the results of the Arabic characteristic factor, it was found out that the non-Muslim students of FIB UI in the Class of 2020 had a positive perception (85.7%) towards Arabic in terms of their Arabic characteristic factor. Moreover, it also meant that their perception was inversely proportional to the statements mentioned in those three Arabic characteristic factor indicators.

Factor 2: The non-Muslim students' personal assessment/assumption affects their perception towards Arabic.

Factor 2 consisted of three statement indicators namely "I think that good command of Arabic is not much required in the professional or the working life", "Saudi Arabia is the only country stipulating Arabic as its official state language", and "It seems to me that the people around me will think that I am going to convert to Islam if I start learning Arabic". The factor based on those three indicators was named the assessment/assumption factor. Based on the results of the assessment/assumption factor, it was found out that the non-Muslim students of FIB UI in the Class of 2020 had a neutral/so-so assessment/assumption (67.4%) toward Arabic. They did not assess or assume Arabic as something positive or negative, but as something neutral.

Factor 3: Language as a religious identity affects the non-Muslim students' perception towards Arabic.

Factor 3 consisted of three statement indicators namely "I agree with those who say that Arabic is the most difficult language in the world", "Arabic is made sacred by the Muslims, so it can only be used in Islamic religious events", and "My family does not allow me to say general Arabic terms usually said by the Muslims such as *bismillah*, *alhamdulillah*, *assalamualaikum*, and so on in my daily life". The factor based on those three indicators was named the Arabic-as-a-religious-identity factor. Based on the results of the Arabic-as-a-religious-identity factor, it was found out that they had a neutral/so-so perception (75.7%) toward Arabic as a religious identity. They did not perceive that Arabic was a certain identity of a religion, but they did not refute that Arabic played such an important role in Islam.

Factor4: Several stereotypes of the Muslims affect the non-Muslim students' perception towards Arabic.

Factor 4 consisted of two statement indicators namely, "A non-Muslim was once deemed to insult Islam since he or she said/used some Arabic word in the mass media. If I did the same thing, it would be highly likely for me to get a similar fate" and "I am not allowed to use Arabic (in various attributes such as clothing items, paintings, pictures, and so on) indiscriminately since that action will offend the Muslims". The factor based on those two indicators was named the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor. Based on the results of the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor, it was found out that the non-Muslim students of FIB UI in the Class of 2020 had a negative perception (56.2%) towards Arabic in terms of the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor. It indicated that they had a corresponding perception to the statements stated in those two stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor indicators.

Stereotyping is an assessment on a person or a group of people based on the action or the characteristic of another group, where that person or that group of people can be categorized into. Their negative perception towards Arabic could be observed from the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor perhaps due to several occasions in the past putting a non-Muslim in trouble due to his or her use of Arabic or an attribute written in Arabic on a certain occasion. Like it or not, those event have created some stereotypes of the Muslims in those non-Muslim communities, and they will in turn affect those non-Muslims' perception towards the related aspects such as their interests in learning Arabic.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study on the factors affecting the non-Muslim students' of FIB-UI in the Class of 2020, it is concluded that those factors affecting their perception towards Arabic are the introduction factor, the Arabic characteristic factor, the personal assessment or assumption factor, the language-as-a-religious-identity factor, and the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factor. They have a positive perception towards Arabic, and it can be observed from the characteristic factor. Moreover, they have a neutral/so-so perception towards Arabic, and it can be observed from the assessment/assumption factor and the language-as-a-religious-identity factor. Finally, they have a negative perception towards Arabic, and it can be observed from the stereotypes-of-the-Muslims factors.

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