

Participants' Perceptions of the Role of Musabaqah Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir in Enhancing Arabic Language Competence among Non-Arab Speakers

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Abstract

The Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition has the potential to enhance Arabic language learning by improving speaking and reading skills, text comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and psychological aspects such as self-confidence and learning motivation. This study aimed to describe the perceptions of students participating in the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition regarding its contribution to Arabic language skills and psychological aspects. A qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design was employed. Twenty participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews from November 18 to December 5, 2025, and analyzed by selecting relevant information, categorizing it according to research themes, and drawing conclusions from patterns in participants' experiences. Findings show that participation in the competition enhanced students' Arabic language skills, especially speaking confidence and fluency, reading skills, comprehension of language structures, and vocabulary mastery. The competition also positively affected psychological aspects, reflected in increased self-confidence and learning motivation. The Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition contributes to improving Arabic language skills as well as participants' self-confidence and learning motivation.

Keywords:

Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir,
Arabic Language Learning,
Language Skills,
Self-Confidence,
Learning Motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of sound symbols that is arbitrary and unique, functioning as a means of communication, as emphasized by Ronald Wardhaugh (Anam et al., 2021). Among the world's languages, Arabic holds a strategic position as both a religious and an international language with a rich corpus of Islamic scholarship. Arab scholars developed Arabic in parallel with the achievements of great civilizations in the past across various fields of knowledge, including philosophy, medicine, and history (Pertiwi & Tsaqifa, 2023). Mastery of Arabic is therefore not only essential for understanding religious teachings but also serves as a key instrument for broadening intellectual, cultural, and scientific horizons.

However, the reality of Arabic language learning in Indonesia continues to face serious challenges, particularly for non-Arab speakers. Many learners perceive Arabic as difficult and monotonous due to repetitive and unvaried instructional practices (Baroroh & Rahmawati, 2020). The core issue lies in the inability to integrate the four language skills—maharah istimā', kalām, qirā'ah, and kitābah—in a comprehensive manner, which results in suboptimal learner participation in the instructional process (Retnawati et al., 2020). This condition ultimately leads to low levels of learning motivation among students and university learners in acquiring Arabic language competence.

In response to these challenges, arts- and competition-based instructional innovations have been implemented, one of which is Musabaqah Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir (Arabic poetry recitation competition). This activity integrates technical language skills with an appreciation of poetic aesthetics. It is specifically designed to strengthen listening (istimā'), speaking (kalām), reading (qirā'ah), and writing (kitābah) skills, enabling participants to practice all four competencies holistically. Piliang et al., (2023) explain that poetry recitation is not merely the articulation of words but also involves an emotional engagement with the meanings conveyed in the poem. Despite the substantial potential of this competition to enhance language skills, in-depth studies examining how participants perceive the contribution of this activity remain very limited.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of arts-based approaches in Arabic language learning. Anam et al., (2021), in their study, found that poetry reading activities can foster students' affection for the Arabic language. In a similar vein, Fadlin highlighted the benefits of implementing syi'ir-based methods in formal instruction (Fadlin, 2023). Furthermore, Mufidah & Izha Rohima, (2022) provided empirical evidence that Arabic language competitions significantly contribute to the development of maharah kalām and qirā'ah, while simultaneously enhancing learning motivation. These findings serve as concrete evidence that competitive activities are highly effective for non-Arab speakers.

Nevertheless, there remains a lack of research that specifically investigates participants' perceptions of Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir regarding its contribution to improving Arabic language competence, even though perception is understood as a process of organizing sensory data that enables individuals to become aware of themselves and their environment (Nisa et al., 2023). This study seeks to address this gap by describing participants' perceptions of the impact of the competition on the enhancement of language skills as well as psychological aspects such as self-confidence and motivation. The findings of this research are expected to provide practical insights for educators in designing more effective and enjoyable learning experiences through competitive platforms.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. This approach was selected to explore in depth the lived experiences and perceptions of participants in Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir regarding the contribution of the competition to Arabic language learning, particularly in relation to Arabic language skills and psychological aspects, namely self-confidence and learning motivation. The research was conducted as part of the Sukarabicfest event at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. The participants consisted of university students who took part in the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition and represented various higher education institutions across Indonesia. This context was deliberately chosen because it involved participants from diverse institutional backgrounds, thereby allowing for a wide range of perceptions regarding the competition activities.

Participant selection was carried out using purposive sampling, targeting students who participated in the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition in accordance with the focus of the study and who were willing to provide information related to their learning experiences through participation in the competition. A total of 20 participants were selected

as the primary informants. Respondent recruitment was conducted through Instagram and the official WhatsApp groups of the competition, which served as the main communication platforms between the organizing committee and the participants.

The researcher acted as the key instrument and was directly involved in the processes of data collection and analysis. Data were collected through interviews with competition participants to explore their experiences related to the contribution of the competition to Arabic language learning. An interview guide was developed to examine the influence of the competition on speaking skills (maharah al-kalām), reading skills (maharah al-qirā'ah), Arabic language comprehension, vocabulary mastery (mufradāt), as well as psychological aspects, namely self-confidence and learning motivation. Arabic language skills were examined in relation to speaking fluency, reading fluency, understanding of textual structures, and the ability to use vocabulary, while the psychological aspects focused on self-belief and internal drive to master the Arabic language. According to Pertiwi and Tsaqifa, (2023), Arabic language skills are not limited to fluency in speaking and reading but also require a deep understanding of textual structures and vocabulary usage. On the other hand, learning success is also strongly influenced by psychological factors; Manurung et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of self-confidence in one's personal abilities, while Prihartanta et al., (2015) define motivation as an internal drive that functions as the primary "fuel" in the learning process. Data collection was conducted from 18 November to 5 December 2025. The data were analyzed by selecting relevant interview results, grouping them into themes aligned with the research focus, and drawing conclusions based on patterns that emerged from the participants' experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Participants' Perceptions of the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir Competition toward the Enhancement of Arabic Language Skills

This section presents the empirical findings regarding university students' perceptions of the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition and its contribution to the improvement of Arabic language skills. The results are based on interview data obtained from 20 participants and focus on four main aspects of language competence: speaking skills (maharah al-kalām), reading skills (maharah al-qirā'ah), Arabic language comprehension, and vocabulary mastery (mufradāt).

1. Speaking Skills (maharah al-kalām)

The interview results indicate variation in participants' perceptions regarding the influence of the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition on speaking skills. Fourteen out of twenty participants (70%) reported that the competition positively influenced their courage and fluency in speaking, particularly in public performance contexts. Participants perceived that intensive practice and repeated performance experiences improved articulation and self-confidence.

"The competition has an influence on speaking fluency, although it requires a higher intensity of poetry practice" (Participant 2).

"The courage to speak in public proves that the competition has a positive influence on speaking skills" (Participant 10).

"The competition influences fluency and serves as a medium for practicing speaking skills" (Participant 15).

Conversely, six participants (30%) stated that the competition did not significantly influence their everyday conversational fluency. They perceived poetry recitation as a monologic and memorization-based activity that does not train two-way communicative interaction.

"This competition does not significantly influence Arabic speaking reflexes" (Participant 12).

"The rarity of using poetic vocabulary in daily life causes the competition to have no effect on speaking fluency" (Participant 9).

2. Reading Skills (maharah al-qirā'ah)

Seventeen out of twenty participants (85%) reported improvement in reading skills after participating in the competition. Repeated practice during preparation enhanced accuracy of makhraj, intonation, and reading fluency. Participants also reported conducting self-correction to meet performance standards.

"The investigation of linguistic aspects of syi'ir contributes to the improvement of reading skills" (Participant 10).

"Independent practice of adding harakat contributes to the improvement of reading skills" (Participant 6).

"The frequency of reading practice greatly helps improve reading skills" (Participant 12).

However, three participants (15%) stated that the competition did not influence their reading skills. This was attributed to the non-standard grammatical structures of poetic texts and the limited quantity of texts.

"This activity is considered to have little significant influence on grammatical aspects of reading skills" (Participant 3).

"The limited quantity of poetic texts causes the competition to have no significant impact on reading skills" (Participant 17).

"The complexity of free poetic writing means the competition has not yet improved reading skills" (Participant 11).

3. Arabic Language Comprehension

Fifteen participants (75%) reported that the competition encouraged them to understand meaning and sentence structure prior to performance. Participants felt that comprehension was necessary to determine pauses, emphasis, and expression during recitation.

"The competition greatly influences the improvement of understanding meaning and grammatical structure" (Participant 8).

"The unique Nahwu–Shorof analysis in poetry influences comprehension improvement" (Participant 10).

"The competition significantly enhances grammatical and structural understanding of Arabic" (Participant 19).

Meanwhile, five participants (25%) stated that the competition did not influence their comprehension, as they relied primarily on memorization and translation tools rather than structural understanding.

"The competition does not significantly influence the understanding of meaning or sentence structure" (Participant 17).

"The competition still lacks influence on understanding complex sentence structures" (Participant 16).

4. Vocabulary Mastery (mufradāt)

Thirteen participants (65%) reported improvement in vocabulary mastery after participating in the competition. Poetic texts introduced new vocabulary rarely used in daily conversation, motivating participants to search for meanings independently.

"Interest in poetry influences the expansion of new vocabulary" (Participant 4).

"Participation in this activity directly influences the acquisition of new vocabulary" (Participant 1).

"New vocabulary knowledge contributes to vocabulary improvement" (Participant 20).

Seven participants (35%) did not provide specific responses regarding vocabulary improvement, indicating abstention on this aspect during interviews.

5. Psychological Impact on Arabic Language Learning
a. Self-Confidence

Eighteen out of twenty participants (90%) reported increased self-confidence after participating in the competition. Repeated public performances helped participants manage fear and nervousness.

“The desire to perform in various Arabic language events proves a positive influence on self-confidence” (Participant 18).

“The frequency of public performance automatically increases speaking confidence” (Participant 12).

“Repeated participation in competitions gradually enhances self-confidence” (Participant 8).

Two participants (10%) reported no significant improvement due to forced participation and perceived lack of basic skills.

“Being forced to perform causes the competition to have little influence on self-confidence” (Participant 14).

“So far, no influence on self-confidence has been identified” (Participant 11).

b. Learning Motivation

Eighteen participants (90%) reported increased motivation to learn Arabic after participating in the competition. Competitive dynamics and judges' evaluations were perceived as motivational triggers.

“This competition increases motivation to develop Arabic language skills” (Participant 15).

“The competition provides supportive influence on learning productivity” (Participant 13).

“Interest in Arabic songs influences increased learning motivation” (Participant 2).

Two participants (10%) reported no effect on motivation, citing low intrinsic motivation and perceived irrelevance of the competition to personal interests.

“This activity does not significantly influence learning enthusiasm” (Participant 14).

“The competition is considered to have no significant impact on learning motivation” (Participant 12).

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition contributes positively to both linguistic and psychological dimensions of Arabic language learning, although the magnitude of impact varies across skill domains and individual readiness.

In terms of maharah al-kalām, the increase in speaking courage and fluency—particularly in public performance—indicates that the competition functions as an effective performative training medium. This aligns with Mufidah et al. (2022), who found that performance-based competitions such as Khitobah significantly enhance speaking skills due to sustained public speaking practice and confidence-building. However, the absence of two-way interaction explains why communicative speaking competence in daily conversation did not develop optimally, corroborating Retnawati et al., (2020), who emphasize the necessity of interactive environments for speaking skill acquisition.

The impact on maharah al-qirā'ah was more pronounced. Intensive reading practice, self-correction, and accuracy demands improved pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. This supports Piliang et al. (2023) and Qomari et al., (2022), who highlight the role of micro-skills—such as breath control, pauses, and stress—in effective oral reading. The challenges faced by a minority of participants reflect the aesthetic freedom of poetic structures, which often deviate from standard syntax, consistent with Sakdiah and Sihombing regarding syntactic and semantic obstacles in language comprehension (Sakdiah & Sihombing, 2023).

Regarding Arabic language comprehension, the competition encouraged deeper engagement with nahwu and shorof for most participants, driven by performance demands. This finding is consistent with Yahaya et al., (2024), who argue that Musabaqah environments stimulate intensive linguistic exploration to meet performance standards. Similarly, Cahyono et al. demonstrated that structured performance preparation enhances linguistic awareness and confidence (Cahyono et al., 2024). Participants who relied on memorization and translation tools experienced limited gains, supporting Pamessangi, who stresses that grammatical and lexical mastery is essential for independent comprehension (Pamessangi, 2019).

Vocabulary acquisition was also positively affected, as poetic texts exposed participants to rich and uncommon lexical items. This confirms Yahaya et al. (2024) and Istiqomah & Sopian, 2025, who emphasize that engagement with high-aesthetic texts promotes deep vocabulary learning through autonomous meaning exploration.

Psychologically, the competition significantly enhanced self-confidence and learning motivation for most participants. Repeated public performance fostered courage and resilience, aligning with Manurung et al., (2024), who identify competitions as effective psychological training spaces. Motivation functioned as a driving force for sustained learning engagement, consistent with Prihartanta et al. (2015) and (Hidayah et al., 2023). Conversely, participants lacking basic skills and mental readiness experienced anxiety, reinforcing the importance of preparatory support.

Overall, the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition is effective in enhancing Arabic language competence both technically and psychologically. Initial linguistic readiness and mental preparedness emerge as critical moderating factors, indicating that early reinforcement interventions would maximize the benefits of competitive learning for all participants.

CONCLUSION

Participation in the Qirā'atu al-Syi'ir competition contributes to the enhancement of Arabic language skills for the majority of participants, particularly in terms of speaking courage and fluency, reading skills, understanding of linguistic structures, and vocabulary mastery. The competition also has a positive impact on psychological aspects, manifested in increased self-confidence and learning motivation. Nevertheless, a small number of participants who were less mentally prepared or lacked sufficient motivation did not experience the same degree of improvement.

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