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Evaluation of Arabic Learning Program at State Islamic Religious College During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Purpose Among the main factors required to achieve standard quality in learning foreign languages including Arabic, standardized language test and continuous evaluation are the prerequisites. Such a test and evaluation should be carried out in a planned, gradual, and continuous manner with the aim to get a clear description of the learning development of students as a result of their learning activities. This paper aimed to evaluate the Arabic language learning program at three State Islamic Universities in Indonesia during the COVID-19 period. **Method** This research adopted a field research method, using a qualitative approach. The samples of the study were the State Islamic University of Lampung, the State Islamic University of Malang and the State Islamic University of Makassar. These three universities were sampled from a total of 35 Islamic universities in Indonesia, and each represented West, East and Central Indonesia. Data collection techniques included interviews and documentation search. Data analysis used the condensation, data presentation and conclusion verification method recommended by model of Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2018). **Findings** The results of this study indicates that the three sampled State Islamic Universities did not have any significant differences in evaluation in terms of monitoring, midterm and final exams as well as tutor supervision. However, one difference was seen in the assessment process in the form of a portfolio at the State Islamic University of Malang, which used methods like memorizing and translating text from Indonesian to Arabic. **Implications to Research and Practice** The findings highlight the similarities in the evaluation process of the three State Islamic Universities, the rewards and punishments systems, and the appreciation and punishment awarded to tutors. The selection of learning methods and providing opportunities for practice would also be a useful reference to predict student achievement.

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Introduction

Arabic belongs to the Semitic language family spoken by nations living around the Tigris and Furat rivers, the plains of Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula (Middle East). In fact, the Arabic language had emerged several centuries before Islam, because evidence of the legacy of Arabic literature can only be recorded two centuries before Islam. Besides that, Arabic is also the language of the Arab Quraysh tribe, and known for being a literary and unifying language, capable of accommodating the needs of its users and absorbing various developments in science and technology in various fields. This is partly due to the character and characteristics of the Arabic language which is elastic, adheres to a system of analogies (*qiyas*) and is rich in derivations (*isytiqoq*) and vocabulary (*mufrodat*). In the golden age of Islamic civilization, Arabic was not only the language of religion but also the language of administration, bureaucracy, diplomacy and socio-economic transactions, education and culture.

In the Indonesian perspective, owing to its historical legacy and its significance in the current times, the learning of Arabic as a foreign language requires serious attention. The practitioners and learners of Arabic, however, face a lot of problems. Among the major problems faced in learning Arabic, as stated by Muradi et al. (2020), is the belief that Arabic holds a second-class foreign language in Indonesia after English. The second problem is the purpose of learning Arabic in Indonesia. There are at least two big groups that can be mentioned here. The first group is from modern learners or institutions represented by modern Islamic boarding schools that consider the purpose of learning Arabic is for communication (Bahruddin & Febriani, 2020), while the second group that belongs to learners from *salafi* Islamic boarding schools, consider the purpose of learning Arabic is for understanding the text (Muradi et al., 2020).

The problems related to Arabic learning are often related to curriculum, issues, learning processes and evaluation, with teachers and learners as stakeholders and teaching material as the tools of learning (Agustina, 2018). Curriculum, issues, learning processes and evaluation are interrelated. For example, curriculum policies are related to learning objectives, learning material, learning methods and strategies as well as learning evaluation. In the process of learning Arabic, there is an interaction between the teacher and the learner. Therefore, a harmonious and mutually supportive relationship is needed. It means that learning can go well if the teacher and learners focus on achievement of learning goals. To find out if the goals of learning have been achieved or not, it depends on the evaluation process.

There are several definitions of evaluation for different purposes, situations and requirements. For instance, evaluation is defined as making decisions based on measurement results and standard criteria (Purwanto, 2009); or as results of assessment (Stufflebeam, 2001); or as an activity process to assess something (Sudijono, 2003), or a planned activity to find out something by using an instrument (Wiyono, 2018). Faizah (2019) defines learning evaluation as an activity to evaluate things that are done in the learning process including planning, implementation, and assessment processes and their impact on students. It is also mentioned that evaluation once completed is compared with certain benchmarks to obtain conclusions through a measurement and assessment process (Akbar & Sriwiyana, 2010). All these definitions agree that the aim of evaluation

is to correct deficiencies in learning, and set evaluation as a basis for the next learning process. this objective of evaluation is associated with learning programs; hence evaluation is also seen as an activity to assess a learning program based on certain standards.

There are more than 50 State Islamic Religious Universities in Indonesia with a few of them run flagship programs to teach foreign languages such as Arabic and English. For example, State Islamic University, Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and Antasari are institutions that offer intensive foreign language learning in Arabic and English. Both these languages are integrated in the curriculum of these institutions. Besides, there are also other State Islamic Universitties like Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) that offer Arabic as an integral program in their curriculum.

The success of a language program is best understood from its stated goals, implementation of its curriculum and evaluation (Gunawan, 2011). A good and appropriate evaluation is always based on teaching and learning process and therefore proves to be a true assessment of language learning. Nasution (2020) reports that State Islamic University Malang succeeded in conducting the Arabic language learning, as evident from the improvement in students' Arabic language skills. The success of this program was attributed to the Arabic Language Lecture Special Program team, which successfully implemented the learning program with all it curricular needs (Mustofa & Febrianti, 2021). Likewise, the State Islamic University, Antasari also conducts an intensive Arabic language program at its Language Development Unit. The implementation of this program starts from a placement test, making study groups, defining the teaching-learning process and finally evaluation. Reports have revealed that the State Islamic University Antasari has a clear vision and mission of teaching Arabic language which is a prerequisite of the improvement of the Arabic language knowledge and skills of students.

The current study is a descriptive and explorative research of the Arabic language learning programs offered at three universities: State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung, State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and State Islamic University Alauddin Makassar. The research was based on documentation search and qualitative evaluation of Arabic language programs offered at the sampled institutions.

Literature Review

There is no dearth of studies that have reviewed the evaluation of language learning programs. For instance, Puspita (2015) conducted a research on the evaluation of the Arabic Language Learning at the State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. The study focused on evaluating the Arabic language learning program offered by the Language Development Center (P2B) of the university and explored various aspects of learning program design, quality of learning programs and the results achieved during the learning process. The findings revealed an integrated relationship between program design, curriculum and the evaluation process.

In another study, Setyawan (2015) studied the evaluation design of any Arabic Language Learning Program, and concluded that the success of a program should be based on its evaluation of one to two semesters. The study also recommended that the evaluation

design of the Arabic Learning Program should consist of the evaluation context, evaluation input, evaluation process, and also the evaluation product (Setyawan, 2015).

Evaluated teacher education programs in EFL context from student teachers' perspective and explained the opinions of learners on foreign language learning programs for teachers. This study concluded that the foreign language learning training program for teachers was very supportive in mastering teachers in pedagogic and linguistic competencies.

Faizah (2019) recommended the use of a Countenance Stake Evaluation Design with three program stages, namely Antecedents (Planning Stage), Transaction (Process Stage) and Outputs (Result Stage). The study claimed that the first step of antecedent stage determines the outcome and quality of the program evaluation, which stretches from the learning program planning to its completion. The results of the evaluation at the transaction stage provide the evidence of implementation of learning and its quality parameters. This stage also defines the compatibility between the plans prepared by the teacher and their implementation in the classroom. Finally, the third stage of transaction, derives its quality from the results of the documentation.

Widodo, Setiyawan, and Zahida (2019) conducted a comparative study of the State Islamic University, Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and the University of Malaya (UM), Malaysia in order to evaluate the preparedness level of the Arabic (foreign language) learning programs World Class University Ranking competition. While the objective of this research was to compare the management of two foreign language learning programs (Arabic and English) and their evaluation, the focus was on four components: institutional aspects, curriculum, learning strategies, and implementation problems. The results of this study revealed that the University of Malaya was better prepared to face the World Class University Ranking than the State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.

The above mentioned studies reveal that evaluation of the Arabic language learning program at State Islamic Religious universities during the COVID-19 period has not been studied yet. The focus of this study was therefore on the evaluation system used during the mid-semester and end-semester exams at the three sampled universities, with emphasis on the assessment and supervision process used by tutors (teachers). The study also examined those aspects of evaluation at Arabic language learning program that were impacted during the COVID-19 period and how these three State Islamic Universities evaluated the Arabic language learning program during the pandemic. The choice of the three State Islamic Universities was made as they represent three distinct regions of Indonesia, namely the West, East and Central.

Method

- *Research design*

This research is a field and explorative research of the Arabic language learning programs offered at three universities: State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung, State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and State Islamic University Alauddin Makassar. The study used a descriptive qualitative research design and adopted documentation search and qualitative evaluation of Arabic language programs offered at the sampled institutions.

- *Research Instruments and procedure*

The primary instrument used for data collection was semi structured interviews, conducted with policy makers and implementers of Arabic language learning program. These informants included the Head of the UPT for Language Development, management officials, lecturers and foreign language students. The second method of data collection was the documentation search, which comprised archives, reports, books and research studies related to the evaluation of Arabic learning programs in different universities.

The data collected through research instruments was sourced from the results of interviews and documentation search. After data collection, the relevant data was disaggregated and broken down in a simpler form to make a summary and conclusions (Creswell, 2003).

- *Population and Sample*

The subjects of this research included informants from three state level Islamic universities namely State Islamic University of Raden Intan Lampung, State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and State Islamic University of Alauddin Makassar. This research was conducted in September-November 2021 and the data was derived from the learning period of Arabic during the COVID-19 period (from mid-2020 to mid-2021).

- *Data analysis*

In conducting data analysis, the researcher used the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018) which recommends three stages of data analysis, namely condensation stage, data display stage and verification stage. The first stage of condensation is conducted by sorting, focusing, simplifying and changing data from the results of written field notes, interview transcripts, documents and other materials. The second stage of data display organizes the data collected and information retrieved to lead to a conclusion. The third sage was conclusion/verification which requires to make conclusions based on the data found in this study.

Results and Discussion

The learning system implemented in Indonesia is an online learning system, which was necessitated because of the COVID-19 outbreak. The existence of this epidemic has had a huge impact on all areas of life, from politics, government, social, economic, health, even to education. Hence, in learning Arabic too, online learning method was adopted in the sampled universities. This online learning system in Indonesia caused many obstacles in the process of learning Arabic, more difficult than learning their own native language Indonesian. The reason was because Arabic as a foreign language required a long learning process until the learners are able to master it, unlike the Indonesian language. Moreover, learning Arabic via online methods was even more difficult because it required an advanced network, if it is not taught in person (face-to-face system).

After having taught the Arabic language learning program, the next step was the evaluation, which was carried out by the education units of each state Islamic university sampled for this study. This education unit was also responsible for providing guidance

on the achievement of the learning targets that have been set. For instance, the education unit ensured during its evaluation that the assessment methods intended for the students as well as the entire learning process had been carried out with the correct criteria or not.

The evaluation process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Evaluation of Arabic Learning Programs at sampled universities during the Covid-19 Period

No	Evaluation	State Islamic University Lampung	State Islamic University Malang	State Islamic University Makassar
1	Monitoring System	Through the lecture journal by filling out the Google Form	Through the lecture journal by filling out the Google Form	Through a report by the class leaders.
2	Mid-test	In the eighth session.	In the eighth meeting as stage 1 and stage 3 exam.	In the eighth meeting based on the guidelines in each faculty
3	Final-test	In the sixteenth session.	In the sixteenth meeting as stage 2 and stage 4 exams.	In the sixteenth meeting based on the guidelines in each faculty
4	Process Assessment	Only end-semester test assessments available	Portfolio through assignments and memorization, and also translation from Indonesian to Arabic	Daily assignment
5	Supervision of Tutor	Student assessment survey	Student assessment survey	Report from class leader/student

Before the evaluation is processed, the education unit monitored the learning journal and attendance to see how active students and educators were in carrying out teaching and learning process. In addition, monitoring was also done by conducting field visits to see the progress of learning and reviewing it, so that it could be known immediately if there were problems found. According to Scheerens et al. (2003), there should be three main motives of evaluation, namely setting the desired level of quality, holding education service providers accountable and finally supporting continuous improvement in education. The evaluation process requires adequate monitoring to be tabulated and reported in the final evaluation activity. The use of supervision through lecture journals and attendance was only able to control a small part of learning activities, but in reality supervision activities helped complete the learning process in accordance with expectations.

- *The evaluation system used during COVID-19*

In monitoring process, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of a Google Form account was considered effective enough to find out and evaluate the progress of the teaching activity of educators or tutors. State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung and State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang followed this practice, and filled out lecture journals through Google Forms to monitor teaching attendance. During the interview session, the head of the State Islamic University

Lampung Language Development Center narrated thus: *"We are conducting the evaluating process through filling out lecture journals, and even when the teaching and learning process is in online mode, it is easier for us to fill out google forms as a form of evaluation whether the tutors are doing their responsibilities or not."* In addition, after receiving the filled up Google form, it was processed as a proof of teaching from tutors who replaced the role of staff or leaders in monitoring their attendance.

State Islamic University Malang also followed the same practice of filling the form of monitoring during the COVID-19 period, in line with State Islamic University Lampung. This monitoring was not only for teachers but also for students. The teachers were required to check the attendance of students at each meeting. Both teachers and students who did not fulfill their obligations were given punishment. Such monitoring, it was found, emphasized more on administrative and field aspects too, whether online or offline learning. It was the Language Development Center that processed and prepared the entire monitoring of the teaching and learning process. the Center ensured that the monitoring of the learning process was done in accordance with the prescribed rules. Such a compliance of regulations assisted the evaluation process in deciding an appropriate future policy. It was done by looking at the obstacles in the field so that the goals could be achieved.

Regarding the implementation of the Mid-Semester (UTS) and the Final Semester (UAS) Examinations, it was found that all three sampled universities, State Islamic University Lampung, State Islamic University Malang and State Islamic University Makassar, held UTS in the eighth session and UAS in the sixteenth session (Table 1). Due to the implementation of Arabic learning through the mode of 'Acceleration of Business Implementation,' the State Islamic University Lampung and State Islamic University Malang conducted their UTS and UAS with its help while the State Islamic University Makassar, continued the practice of using the faculty for learning process as well as the conduct of examinations. Munip (2017) asserted that UTS was an important part of evaluating language learning programs and to improve its ongoing learning process; however, UAS acted as the final evaluation that aimed to determine the extent of the students' ability in mastering the learning materials that had been taught.

Harsiati (2001) also opined that evaluation acted as the systematic collection and use of data about a symptom to assign a value to the data based on predetermined provisions. In short, evaluation is the process of determining the value of learners' performance based on certain criteria. These criteria can be in the form of an ideal result or an ideal process of an activity (Harsiati, 2001) and the results of evaluation can conclude whether the process and results have reached the ideal criteria.

In learning Arabic, both test- and non-test evaluation can be used. The tests that can be used in the evaluation of Arabic learning are written tests and oral tests. A written test is used to evaluate *istima'* (listening), *qira'ah* (reading) and *kitabah* (writing) skills. Such a test aims to measure the level of students' ability to understand the material that has been taught. When an oral test is used for skills of *kalam* (speaking), it aims to measure how well students are able to speak Arabic and further communicate using good and correct Arabic (Miladya, 2015). On the other hand, non-test evaluation can be used to evaluate knowledge, skills and attitudes of learners (Osterlind, 1998) and nurture the creativity of learners in order to thoroughly explore their abilities (Mustofa & Febrianti, 2021).

In measuring foreign language skills, almost all state Islamic religious universities in Indonesia have implemented and focused on the mastery and ability of speaking, writing, listening and reading skills, all of which constitute as one single learning unit. These four skills are carried out in an integrative way using an all-in-one system. Out of the three sampled universities, State Islamic University Alaudin Makassar, however, has adopted a different process of Arabic learning. This process employs a separate system for foreign language study programs and an integrative system for other study programs. The language development center in the university conducts two tests, namely a middle test and a final test, with different materials for each test. In addition, preparations for language proficiency tests such as TOEFL etc. are carried out before the thesis examination, which helps students to hone their language skills and prepare for foreign language examinations.

Assessment of learning process during COVID-19

Based on the data, it was learnt that the sampled universities followed different methods for assessment of learning process. each of these universities varies in the kind of implementation of the assessment process. For instance, State Islamic University Lampung did not carry out any assessment of the learning process; however, it provided assessment through an exam at the end of the semester. State Islamic University Malang carried out an assessment of the learning process in the form of a portfolio, namely assignments and memorization, and translation of texts from Indonesian to Arabic. Meanwhile, State Islamic University Makassar carried out process assessments in the form of daily assignments and step by step assessment of learning achievement at each stage. Thus both State Islamic University Malang and State Islamic University Makassar assessed the learning process with various activities in order to improve language skills for students The assessment of the learning process actually helped in the evaluation of the development of students' abilities in language acquisition.

On the contrary, the third State Islamic University Malang applied the principles of assessment process and evaluation results through portfolio assessment. A portfolio assessment is a type where the assessment process and evaluation can be done at the same time (Munip, 2017). For students, a portfolio is a record and a collection of work, which becomes data about their learning development process. Meanwhile, for tutors, the assessment of the learning process becomes data that makes tutors care about the development of students' abilities. According to Mehrens and Lehmann (1991), educators are always concerned with measuring and evaluating their students' abilities while also feeling a high responsibility to continue to improve their abilities. This was much evident during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hill et al., 2020) when students became creative and independent due to the demands of the conditions and therefore try to overcome problems in online learning, including self-motivating themselves in learning, looking for additional learning material and online group study (Deviana et al., 2022; Jumadi, 2022).

Supervision of Tutors

Regarding the supervision of tutors, State Islamic University Lampung monitored every learning process or face-to-face meeting through lecture journals while the journal was filled out by students via Google Form. The head of Acceleration of Business

Implementation State Islamic University Lampung shared their implementation of evaluation process: *"At the end of the semester, we evaluate the implementation of the foreign language learning process both for the students and the evaluation results of monitoring, including the observations on the presence of the instructor in the class. This is intended so that foreign language learning is better in the future."* In line with this opinion of the head of Acceleration of Business Implementation, one of the Arabic language lecturers stated: *"Evaluation is also carried out on lecturers through surveys. Students assess lecturers for the learning process that has been carried out on the survey link."*

This continuous supervision of tutors was carried out as a part of evaluation of the foreign language learning program. Since all tutors fulfilled their responsibilities in the implementation of supervision, it was certainly related to the existence of a reward and punishment policy. The head of Acceleration of Business Implementation at State Islamic University Lampung said: *"…..... if there are lecturers who have not fulfilled the meeting, then they must be replaced. However, if lecturers cannot fulfill their teaching responsibilities without any clear reason, then they would be given punishment in the form of reducing the number of face-to-face meetings. For instructors who were unable to attend properly several times, they were given punishment in the form of reducing the number of face-to-face hours or not being called back to become instructors in the next semester. This is done to maintain discipline in the foreign language learning process, so that students get good service and get assistance to be able to meet the required TOEFL scores."*

After monitoring, Acceleration of Business Implementation would evaluate by looking at and re-observing the results of monitoring and field notes for follow-up in the upcoming semester. Follow-up was important because the process of learning a foreign language must always be better. Meanwhile, the head of Acceleration of Business Implementation at State Islamic University Malang stated about the implementation of supervision of tutors: *".....the results of the evaluation obtained are followed up by the manager. Solutions to the existing problems are sought, lecturers with low performance are given coaching and punishment. This is intended with the aim of lecturers and students improving their performance, on the other hand, high-performing lecturers or students with good achievements get rewards from the management."*

Evaluation provides an overview of the results of a learning process. This also applies to the evaluation that has been carried out by Acceleration of Business Implementation at each university. Besides, there are two types of evaluation: one, evaluation of the learning process for students in order to achieve the objectives of learning; and second, evaluation carried out on lecturers to determine the extent of their performance in the learning process. The results of these two types of evaluation were used for future improvements. It is hoped that every language program that has been implemented would be able to provide maximum results and achieve learning targets. If there are problems related to the learning process, for example, approaches and methods that are not suitable, then innovation from tutors was needed (Muradi et al., 2020).

Finally, the head of the Acceleration of Business Implementation at State Islamic University Makassar stated: *"Based on implementation guidelines, both PIBA and Acceleration of Business Implementation carry out monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of language programs. Monitoring and evaluation are carried out through the class leader. The class leader reports to*

PIBA if there are irregularities or inconveniences in the lecture process during the semester. At least, there has been one teacher who has been dismissed, due to not carrying out his responsibilities.

Such evidences and firsthand information collected through the interviews, it is clearly seen that the three State Islamic Universities supervised tutors and monitored the implementation of Arabic learning process. This is intended to fulfill the obligations of tutors and fulfill the rights of students in learning. Research data on supervision also showed that the provision of rewards and punishments makes tutors carry out the learning process actively and seriously through achieving an adequate number of face-to-face meetings by prioritizing the effectiveness of foreign language learning. For State Islamic University Lampung and State Islamic University Makassar, the reward that was given if they can carry out the learning process in accordance with their obligations was being able to become a tutor in the next semester. State Islamic University Malang set the reward in the form of promotion to become a team teaching coordinator or the opportunity to be appointed as a permanent lecturer so as to improve their welfare. Punishment was given in the form of a warning of reduction or termination of teaching in the coming semester.

Finally, the results of the evaluation of the Arabic language learning program led to the conclusion that evaluation activities depend upon following general principles: 1) continuity, the evaluation should not be processed incidentally because Arabic learning is a continuous process. Evaluation results obtained at one time must be related to results at previous times. 2) comprehensive, in evaluating an object, Acceleration of Business Implementation must take the entire object as evaluation material. 3) fair and objective, Acceleration of Business Implementation must be fair and impartial in the evaluation process, and it must assess objectively based on the ability of students. 4) cooperative, in the process of evaluation, Acceleration of Business Implementation should cooperate with all parts involved, such as tutors and students, and 5) practical, the evaluation tool used should be easy to use both by Acceleration of Business Implementation and others who would use the tool (Arifin, 2013).

Conclusion

The evaluation program for Arabic learning conducted by the three sampled universities, namely State Islamic University Raden Intan Lampung, State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang and State Islamic University Alaudin Makassar, showed no significant differences in terms of monitoring aspects, evaluation through mid-semester and end-semester exams and supervision of tutors. The monitoring of tutors was done by filling out lecture journals via Google form. The UTS was held in the eighth session and UAS in the end of the semester or in the sixteenth session. Different things in the evaluation process are in the assessment process in the form of a portfolio at State Islamic University Malang along with a tiered assessment through learning achievements at each stage. The three State Islamic Universities also used rewards and punishments as a form of appreciation and punishment from the results of evaluations program for tutors.

The study recommends that evaluating a learning process should be done with the aim that students should become trained in mastering the language skills taught at each State Islamic University. Future research should attempt to assess the learning process needed for State Islamic Religious university students in order for them to get used to and master Arabic well.

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