A Comparative Analysis of Arabic and English Literacy in Islamic and Public Universities: Perspectives of Students and Lecturers

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Abstract: This study is entitled A Comparative Analysis of Arabic and English Language Literacy in Islamic and General Universities: Students' and Lecturers' Perspectives . It aims to compare the literacy conditions of Arabic and English in two types of universities and identify perceptions, teaching strategies, and factors influencing language proficiency from students' and lecturers' perspectives. The research employed a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design, involving in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis at two higher education institutions. Participants included 12 students and 6 lecturers. Findings revealed significant differences in motivation, usage practices, and language policy between the two university types. Students at Islamic universities showed greater focus on Arabic, while those at general universities prioritized English. However, both groups faced similar challenges in active language production. Recommendations are provided to improve teaching strategies and align language policy implementation.

Keywords: *Language literacy, Arabic, English, Islamic university, General University*

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membandingkan kondisi literasi Bahasa Arab dan Bahasa Inggris di dua jenis universitas, serta mengidentifikasi persepsi, strategi pembelajaran, dan faktor yang memengaruhi penguasaan kedua bahasa tersebut dari perspektif mahasiswa dan dosen. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi komparatif, melibatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen di dua institusi perguruan tinggi. Partisipan terdiri dari 12 mahasiswa dan 6 dosen. Hasil menunjukkan adanya perbedaan signifikan dalam motivasi, praktik penggunaan, dan kebijakan pembelajaran antar kedua universitas. Mahasiswa universitas Islam lebih fokus pada Bahasa Arab, sementara mahasiswa universitas umum lebih tertarik pada Bahasa Inggris. Namun, kedua kelompok menghadapi tantangan serupa dalam produksi bahasa aktif. Rekomendasi disampaikan untuk meningkatkan strategi pembelajaran dan sinkronisasi kebijakan bahasa.

Kata Kunci : Literasi bahasa, Bahasa Arab, Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam, Universitas Umum,

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language literacy refers to a person's ability to read, write, speak, and understand information in a language that is not their native language.[1] In higher education, foreign language literacy becomes more complex because it involves understanding academic texts, the use of technical vocabulary, and the ability to think critically in a scientific context. Arabic and English are two foreign languages that are very relevant in the world of higher education in Indonesia, each of which has a specific function according to the context of the educational institution.[2]

In the era of globalization, mastery of foreign languages is one of the important competencies for students. Foreign language literacy skills allow students to access international references, participate in student exchange programs, and increase competitiveness in the world of work. However, many Indonesian students still have difficulty understanding and using Arabic or English effectively, both in the context of learning and academic communication. This shows the need for an in-depth analysis of the literacy conditions of the two languages in various types of universities.[3]

Islamic universities and public universities have different focuses on developing foreign language literacy.[4] In Islamic universities, Arabic is a top priority because it is the language of the Qur'an and the classical books used as a source of Islamic knowledge. Meanwhile, public universities tend to place greater emphasis on English as a global communication tool and an introduction to science.[5] This difference in orientation leads to differences in learning strategies, perceptions, and literacy skills among students and lecturers from the two types of institutions.[6]

Although both languages have an important role in the world of higher education, the challenges in developing language literacy are still quite significant.[7] Many factors affect the low ability of foreign language literacy among students, including the lack of language practice facilities, the dominance of conventional learning methods, and the lack of internal and external motivation to learn the language.[8] In addition, the low basic language skills since primary and secondary education are also a major obstacle in mastering foreign language literacy in higher education.

The perception of students and lecturers on the importance of foreign language literacy plays an important role in the learning process. Most students at public universities consider English to be more relevant for their future careers, while students at Islamic universities value Arabic more because of its association with religious studies.[9] Lecturers also have a variety of views; some actively use foreign language references, but many still rely on Indonesian materials. Perceptions that are not aligned between institutions, lecturers, and students are an obstacle in the development of language literacy.[10]

This research is here to answer some important questions that have not been fully answered in the previous literature. What is the condition of Arabic and English literacy in Islamic and public universities? Is there a significant difference in the ability and perception of students and lecturers towards the two languages? What factors support or hinder the development of language literacy in both types of institutions? What is the relationship between institutional policies, learning strategies, and the academic environment and student literacy levels? And last but not least, is there a gap between institutional expectations and the reality on the ground?

The main purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of Arabic and English literacy in two types of universities in Indonesia, namely Islamic universities and public universities. More specifically, the study aimed to: (1) identify the levels of Arabic and English literacy in both types of institutions; (2) exploring the perception of students and lecturers on the importance of literacy in both languages; (3) identify supporting and inhibiting

factors in the development of language literacy; (4) to provide recommendations for more effective language learning policies in both types of institutions.

Theoretically, this research will contribute to the fields of linguistics, language education, and higher education policy by producing a comparative analysis model of foreign language literacy. Practically, the results of the research can be used by university leaders, curriculum developers, and educators to design language learning strategies that are more in line with the needs of students. In addition, this research can also be a reference for higher education policy institutions in the regions in designing programs to improve the quality of language education.

Most research on language literacy in Indonesia focuses more on one language, one institution, or one region without looking at comparisons between institutions. Previous studies also tend to focus only on one point of view, for example, only the perspective of students or only the perspective of lecturers. In addition, there are rarely studies that combine Arabic and English literacy analyses simultaneously. Therefore, this study is here to fill this gap by providing an in-depth comparative analysis based on field data from two types of universities with a dual perspective (students and lecturers).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative study design to compare the conditions of Arabic and English literacy in two types of universities, namely Islamic universities and public universities. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to explore perceptions, experiences, and factors that affect language literacy from the perspective of students and lecturers. The comparative study allowed researchers to identify similarities and differences in foreign language literacy mastery between the two institutions in depth. The location of the research was determined purposively by choosing one Islamic university and one public university as the main case. The focus of the research is on academic literacy skills, learning strategies, and subjective views of students and lecturers on the importance of the two languages.[11]

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with students and lecturers from both institutions, direct observation of learning activities related to Arabic and English, and analysis of documents such as curriculum, syllabus, and teaching materials.[12] The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a pre-designed question guide but still left room for participants to explain more broadly. The collected data is then analyzed thematically using coding techniques to find patterns, themes, and meanings that are relevant to the research objectives. Data triangulation is done through sources, methods, and time to improve the validity of results. With the combination of these methods, this study aims to produce a rich and comprehensive description of foreign language literacy in higher education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Students' Perception of Arabic and English Literacy

Interviews with students show a significant difference in perceptions between students of Islamic universities and public universities on the importance of Arabic and English literacy. At Islamic universities, the majority of students say that Arabic is more relevant in their studies because it is used in the reading of the yellow book and the study of the Qur'an. A student of the Faculty of Ushuluddin stated, "I feel that I have to be able to really read Arabic texts because almost all of our references are in the form of old books that are not available in Indonesian."

In contrast, in public universities, students are more likely to view English as the primary tool for accessing international learning resources and improving job competitiveness.

One of the students of the Engineering study program said, "I know Arabic is important, but English is definitely more often used here—both in teaching materials and group presentations." These results are in line with the research of Fitriani (2020), who found that career orientation is the dominant factor in motivation to learn a foreign language.

These differences in perceptions suggest that academic context and study objectives influence how students treat both languages. This also explains why many public university students are less interested in Arabic even though it is available as a course option, while Islamic university students tend to ignore English unless absolutely necessary.

Table 1. Students' Perception of Arabic and English Literacy

Aspects	Islamic University	Public University
Language Priority	Arabic is more important because it is relevant to Islamic studies and the Yellow Book	English is more important as an access tool for international and career reference
Learning Motivation	Religious and academic encouragement; Understanding the text of the Qur'an and the classics	Professional encouragement and globalization; Increase Work Competitiveness
Interest in Other Languages	Most are not interested in English unless required	Interest in Arabic is very low, only a small percentage are interested
Usage in Academia	Used intensively in readings, discussions, and exams	English is used in prese

From a student's perspective (Table 1), Islamic universities place Arabic as a priority language due to its relevance to religious studies, while public universities place more emphasis on the importance of English for global academic and career needs. These differences in motivation and interests have a direct effect on the level of use of both languages in daily activities and classrooms.

Lecturers' Perceptions of Foreign Language Mastery by Students

From the perspective of lecturers, the results showed that both agreed that students' Arabic and English literacy skills are still low, although the causes are different in each institution. At Islamic universities, some lecturers stated that although students had great access to Arabic-language materials, they had difficulty understanding the contextual meaning of classical texts. An Arabic lecturer said, "They can read word for word, but they don't necessarily understand the meaning or philosophical nuances of the text."

In public universities, English lecturers complain about the low active participation of students in language practice. Many students are only able to understand passive texts but are reluctant to speak or write in English. One lecturer stated, "When I asked for a presentation in

English, many chose to be absent rather than talk. It's not a matter of ability, it's a matter of confidence and habits."

These differences reflect the structural challenges in language learning in both types of universities. In Islamic universities, the biggest obstacle is the lack of direct exposure to the use of Arabic in real situations, while in public universities, the obstacles are more in low motivation and lack of intensive speaking practice.

Table 2. Lecturers' Perceptions of Foreign Language Mastery by Students

Aspects	Islamic University	Public University
Reading Ability	Quite good reading of words, lacking in the contextual meaning of Arabic texts	Good at reading simple texts, difficulties in complex texts
Writing Skills	Limited to basic sentence structure	Good enough for light tasks, weak in academic structure
Speaking Ability	Lack of active speaking practice in Arabic	Low confidence and participation in speaking English
Major Inhibiting Factors	Lack of use of Arabic in real-life situations	Lack of active language practice and low m

From the perspective of lecturers (Table 2), although access to learning materials is quite good, active literacy skills such as speaking and writing are still low in both institutions. Lecturers from Islamic universities stated that students could read Arabic texts but had difficulty understanding contextual meanings, while general university lecturers reported that students tended to be passive in English-speaking practice due to a lack of confidence and intrinsic motivation.

Learning Strategies and Language Use in the Academic Space

Observations conducted over three weeks at the two universities showed differences in learning strategies and language use in academic spaces. In Islamic universities, the Arabic learning method tends to be traditional, namely with a grammatical approach and memorization of terms. This method is effective in building the foundation of the language, but it does not provide opportunities for students to use Arabic actively. Discussions and presentations are rarely conducted in Arabic, so students are more accustomed to speaking in Indonesian even though the topics are sourced from Arabic texts.

In contrast, in public universities, English learning is more interactive and based on communicative activities such as group discussions, presentations, and simulations of real-life situations. However, even though the method is more modern, the allocation time and

frequency of use of English in other courses are still very limited. Only a small percentage of lecturers from non-language fields use English in their teaching.

These results show that although learning strategies are different, they are not optimal in improving language literacy overall. As explained by Swain (1985), without a balanced combination of inputs, interactions, and outputs, the development of language skills will be stagnant. Therefore, both Islamic and public universities need to reform learning strategies to focus more on active language production.

Table 3. Learning Strategies and Language Use in the Academic Space

Aspects	Islamic University	Public University
Learning Methods	Grammatical and memorization approach	Communicative and interactive methods
Use of Language in Discussion	Rarely use Arabic	More often use English
Integration in Other Courses	Only in the Religious Study Program	Limited to certain study programs
Language Practice Facilities	Language labs are available but not optimal for use	Laboratory is more actively used, the frequency of m

learning strategies and language use in academic spaces (Table 3) show that Arabic learning methods in Islamic universities tend to be traditional and less interactive, while English learning in public universities is more communicative but the frequency of use is still limited. This indicates the need to revise learning strategies to focus more on active language production.

The Influence of Institutional Policies on Language Literacy

Document analysis and interviews with lecturers and administrators show that institutional policies have an important role in shaping language literacy conditions in both universities. In Islamic universities, Arabic has a high status in the curriculum, with a greater load of hours and regular oral-written exams. However, despite the Arabic language coaching policy, its implementation is not consistent across every faculty. Some faculties such as Tarbiyah and Sharia are stricter in the application of Arabic, while other faculties such as Da'wah and Social Sciences are relatively loose.

In public universities, English is included in the compulsory curriculum for one semester, but it is not a priority in advanced academic activities. Although the university has a vision of globalization and international cooperation, the use of English in scientific publications or seminars is still low. One lecturer stated, "There is a kind of duality here—we want internationalization, but there is no strong incentive for lecturers or students to actually use English consistently."

These findings suggest that although language policies are well-designed, their implementation is often out of sync with practices on the ground. According to the language

policy theory of Spolsky (2004), the success of the policy depends not only on a formal plan, but also on the commitment of the implementer and the support of the academic environment. Without good coordination between university leaders, lecturers, and students, language policies are difficult to realize in daily learning practices.

Table 4. The Influence of Institutional Policies on Language Literacy

Aspects	Islamic University	Public University
Language Status in the Curriculum	Arabic has a high status as a compulsory constitutional court	English as a Constitutional Court is mandatory for 1–2 semesters
Number of Allocation Hours	More hours of Arabic learning (6–8 hours/week)	Fewer English hours (3–4 hours/week)
Capability Evaluation	Routine oral and written tests; Emphasis on the Yellow Book	Evaluation focuses on tests of structure and reading comprehension
Use in Academic Settings	Symbolic in ceremonies, rarely in daily discussions	Used in certain language classes and presentations
Facilities & Program Support	Construction programs have not been evenly distributed	Language labs are available, but not mandatory for all students
Consistency of Implementation	Differences between faculties	Low implementation despite a global vision

Institutional policies (Table 4) play an important role in shaping language literacy conditions. In Islamic universities, Arabic has a high status in the curriculum, but its implementation is uneven across all faculties. In public universities, English is an important tool in the vision of internationalization, but practical support for its implementation is still weak. The gap between formal policy and practice in the field is a major obstacle in the development of language literacy.

Recommendations Based on Findings

Based on the findings of the research, several recommendations can be put forward to improve Arabic and English literacy in colleges:

1. Increased Language Output: Islamic universities need to provide more opportunities for active Arabic language practice, for example through debate forums, presentations, and collaborative projects. Public universities also need to encourage the use of English in various courses.

2. Revised Learning Strategies: Learning methods in both types of universities need to be developed to focus more on the use of language in real contexts, not just theory and exams.
3. Language Policy Synchronization: Language policies need to be supported by a clear implementation program, including lecturer training, language laboratory facilities, and incentives for students who actively use the target language.
4. Inter-Institutional Collaboration: Student exchange programs or joint workshops between Islamic and public universities can help enrich students' linguistic and cultural experiences.

Table 5. Recommendations Based on Findings

RECOMMENDATIONS	ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY	PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
Increased Language Output	Arabic group debates and projects	English presentations and seminars
Revision of Learning Strategies	Arabic communicative approach	Strengthen academic writing and reading skills
Language Policy Synchronization	Guidelines for the implementation of Arabic in all faculties	Incentives for lecturers to use English in all study programs
Development of Practice Facilities	Optimize language labs for conversational practice	Make the language lab a mandatory weekly program

Based on these findings, several recommendations were compiled (Table 5), including improving language output, policy synchronization, developing practice facilities, and collaboration between institutions. These recommendations aim to holistically improve language literacy and address the challenges identified in the research.

Academic Literacy Theory (Academic Literacy)

Academic literacy is not only concerned with the ability to read and write in a particular language, but also involves understanding how information is structured, analyzed, and presented in a scientific context.[13] According to Lea & Street (2006), academic literacy should be viewed as a social practice that is closely related to the norms of educational institutions. In this perspective, literacy mastery is not enough just to master grammatical structures, but also the ability to use language appropriately according to a particular genre and academic goals.[14]

In higher education, academic literacy is the basis for students to access teaching materials, compile scientific papers, and participate in scientific discussions.[15], [16] In Islamic universities, Arabic literacy is often measured by the ability to read the yellow book and understand its meaning, while in public universities, English proficiency is measured by the ability to read journal articles and compose academic essays.[17] This difference shows that academic literacy is strongly influenced by the context of the discipline and the academic environment in which students study.[18]

This academic literacy approach provides an important analytical framework for understanding how students in both types of universities treat Arabic and English as tools for thinking, communicating, and expressing ideas academically.[19], [20] In addition, this theory also helps explain the difference in perceptions between students and lecturers on the importance of foreign language literacy in the development of academic and professional competencies.[21]

Sociocultural Theory

According to Vygotsky (1978), the process of learning language cannot be separated from the social context and interaction between individuals. Socio-cultural theory emphasizes that language knowledge and skills are built through active participation in shared activities, such as discussion, collaboration, and hands-on language practice.[22] The concept of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) explains that progress in language mastery occurs when a person is assisted by others with higher abilities, such as lecturers or peers.[23]

In the context of universities, social interaction is one of the main factors in the development of language literacy.[24] In Islamic universities, for example, students often discuss in small groups using Arabic to analyze religious texts. This kind of interaction helps them improve their ability to read and understand complex texts. In contrast, in public universities, the use of English is more dominant in presentations, seminars, and group projects, creating a different but equally relevant learning environment in the development of language literacy.[25]

Language Policy and Planning – LPP

According to Spolsky (2004), language policy consists of three main elements: language status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning.[26] Status planning determines the position of language in an institution; corpus planning deals with the development of language forms and structures; while acquisition planning focuses on learning and training strategies.[27] These three elements are particularly relevant in understanding how Islamic and public universities regulate the use of Arabic and English in their curricula and academic activities.

In Islamic universities, Arabic usually has a high status because it is the language of the Qur'an and the classical books. Therefore, many such institutions implement strict learning policies for the Arabic language, including compulsory courses, oral and written exams, and language training programs.[28] In contrast, in public universities, English tends to take priority due to its relevance to international references, scholarly publications, and the global workforce. This is reflected in the existence of TOEFL/IELTS programs, intensive language courses, and the integration of English in several courses.

Through this LPP approach, this study will analyze how language policies in both types of universities affect the perception and literacy ability of students and lecturers. In addition, this study will also identify whether there is a gap between the institution's official policies and implementation in the field, as well as how this affects the development of foreign language literacy among students.[29]

Model Input-Interaction-Output (Swain, 1985)

Swain (1985) stated that in addition to input (language exposure) and interaction (use of language in real situations), output (language production) is an important component in language mastery. According to this model, active language production in both oral and written form allows learners to reflect, revise, and refine their linguistic abilities. Without

adequate output, learners tend to have only passive understanding without strong expressive abilities.[30]

In the context of learning Arabic and English in college, this model helps explain why many students can understand the text but have difficulty when asked to express their opinions or write in the language. In Islamic universities, although students have a lot of exposure (input) to the Arabic language through reading books, they often have little opportunity to use the language actively (output). Similarly in public universities, although many English references are available, speaking and writing practice is still a major challenge.

Therefore, in this study, the Input-Interaction-Output model was used to evaluate whether learning Arabic and English in both types of universities provides sufficient opportunities for students to be actively involved in the use of language. In addition, this model helps to explain the relationship between learning strategies and the development of language literacy among students and lecturers.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the comparison of Arabic and English literacy in two types of universities, namely Islamic universities and public universities, with the perspective of students and lecturers. This research was conducted through a qualitative approach with a comparative study design, involving in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis from two higher education institutions.

This study reveals significant differences in the condition of Arabic and English literacy in Islamic and public universities. In Islamic universities, Arabic is the dominant language in learning, especially in religious faculties such as Ushuluddin and Sharia. Students at this institution have great access to Arabic texts, but their abilities tend to be passive due to the lack of active speaking and writing practice. In contrast, in public universities, English is more widely used in teaching materials, presentations, and academic references. However, many students still have difficulty understanding complex texts and lack confidence when using spoken English. These differences suggest that although the two institutions have different language focuses, challenges in active literacy development are still found in both places.

From the perspective of students and lecturers, there is a clear difference in perception and motivation for the importance of the two languages. Islamic university students are generally more interested in Arabic because of its relevance to their religious studies, while English is only seen as important if it is needed for a specific task. In contrast, general university students value English more as a global communication tool and career support, while Arabic is considered less relevant to their field of study. From the lecturers' side, most of them stated that the literacy ability of the two languages is still low, both in terms of understanding the context and active language production. This emphasizes the need for a more interactive learning strategy so that students are more involved in the real use of language.

Factors that support and inhibit the development of language literacy were also successfully identified in this study. Institutional policies, allocation of learning time, and language laboratory facilities are the main supporting factors. However, policy implementation is often out of sync between plans and practices on the ground. The lack of active language practice, low intrinsic motivation of students, and dominance of conventional learning methods are the main obstacles. In addition, the lack of incentives for lecturers to use the target language in the learning process is also an obstacle in itself. Therefore, to improve foreign language literacy, both types of universities need to revise learning strategies, increase

the frequency of language practice, and provide full support for the implementation of language policies throughout the academic environment.

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