



# The Effectiveness of a Simulated Arabic Language Environment in Enhancing Communicative Competence among Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language: An Applied Study at the Faculty of Arabic Language, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University

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## Abstract

In light of contemporary pedagogical trends that emphasize the creation of immersive learning environments to enhance communicative competence in second language acquisition, this field-based study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a simulated Arabic language environment in fostering both oral and written communicative skills among non-native speakers enrolled in the "Communicative Arabic" course at the Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University, Brunei Darussalam, during the academic year 2024. The study adopted a descriptive-analytical quantitative methodology, chosen for its capacity to provide measurable and accurate indicators reflecting students' perceptions of the linguistic environment across its human and physical dimensions. A closed-ended questionnaire was developed based on the five-point Likert scale, encompassing twelve key indicators that reflect both formal and informal communicative aspects within the university setting. The instrument was validated by a panel of experts in the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign language, ensuring cultural and contextual relevance (Fraenkel et al., 2015, pp. 125–128). The sample consisted of 14 purposively selected students out of the original population of 21 students (66.6%), which is deemed statistically sufficient for small-sample quantitative analyses (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 80). Data analysis was conducted using the Weighted Percentage method, enabling precise ranking of indicators and identification of strengths and gaps through a standardized formula (Field, 2013, pp. 65–70). The results revealed a notable strength in human-interaction indicators, with Arabic communication between instructors scoring 81.4%, between instructors and students 77.1%, and student responses to instructors 75.7%. These high percentages indicate the presence of "comprehensible input" within a low-anxiety, high-interaction learning context, as advocated by

Krashen (1985, pp. 31–39). In contrast, horizontal peer-to-peer communication among students showed lower engagement (62.9%), as did the use of Arabic in extracurricular settings (64.3%), highlighting a socio-communicative gap that warrants structural intervention. Regarding the textual and material environment, the findings revealed inconsistencies in the Arabization of signage, administrative regulations, and public announcements, with positive responses ranging between 61.4% and 75.7%. This suggests a partial presence of Arabic in the visual landscape, falling short of what Nation & Macalister (2010, p. 106) describe as a "fully saturated language environment." The analysis of extracurricular activities indicated that they serve as a valuable complementary avenue for developing oral communicative skills (72.9%) more so than written skills (70%). This calls for a redesign of such activities to incorporate integrated functional writing tasks, as emphasized by Canale & Swain (1980).

**Keywords:** Language Environment, Arabic, Communicative Competence, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University

## I. Introduction

The concept of an "Arabic language environment" in the context of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers constitutes a foundational pillar in the development of communicative competence and the promotion of authentic linguistic practice within university settings. Language, in this perspective, transcends the boundaries of syntax and morphology—it is a socio-cultural activity practiced within real-life contexts, where meanings are negotiated, communicative skills are constructed, and pragmatic abilities are cultivated (Halliday, 1978, p. 3). Within such a framework, the demand intensifies for the creation of a "natural or simulated linguistic environment"—one that enables learners



to use the language as a means of acquisition rather than mere memorization.

Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA), as one of the leading institutions for Arabic language education in Southeast Asia, represents a unique and fertile ground for examining the effectiveness of the surrounding environment in fostering genuine language learning. The university's multilingual and multicultural context makes it particularly suitable for evaluating how well environmental factors support language acquisition.

It is within this academic and institutional context that the present field study finds its significance. The study seeks to evaluate the manifestations of the Arabic language environment at UNISSA and investigate its impact on the development of students' oral and written communicative competencies. This is achieved through a systematic analysis of twelve carefully selected indicators spanning both human-interactive and material-textual dimensions of the language environment.

## II. Theoretical Framework

A. Krashen's Language Environment Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985)

Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory places central importance on the concept of "Comprehensible Input," which, according to him, becomes effective only when embedded within a natural, engaging, and supportive environment. Language, he argues, is acquired—not merely learned—when the learner is immersed in a vibrant linguistic context that facilitates functional communication and provides authentic linguistic stimuli. The optimal environment, in Krashen's view, is one that is rich in input, low in anxiety, and high in interaction, thereby enabling the subconscious development of linguistic competence (Krashen, 1985, pp. 31–39).

B. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is founded on the core assumption that the primary goal of language learning is real-life communication, not merely the mastery of linguistic forms. Accordingly, both classroom and extracurricular settings must simulate communicative realities through authentic language tasks, social exchanges, and pragmatic interactions that emphasize language function over form (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 159–165). In this

context, the presence of a natural or simulated communicative environment becomes a decisive factor, as it allows learners to use language meaningfully in context, rather than simply practicing it in isolation.

C. Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980)

Canale and Swain's framework distinguishes four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical, sociocultural, strategic, and discourse/pragmatic competence. These competencies are developed incrementally through a language environment that encourages real-time interaction and provides multiple contexts for meaningful language use. In contrast, the absence or weakness of such an environment often leads to an over-reliance on artificial drills and decontextualized exercises, resulting in what is termed "passive competence"—a stagnation in productive language skills despite theoretical understanding.

D. The Role of Environment in University Contexts

Recent studies highlight that students exposed to linguistically rich and varied environments demonstrate significantly faster development in communicative skills, particularly within university settings where language is expected to serve as a daily cognitive and academic tool (Alptekin, 2002, p. 62; Harmer, 2015, pp. 85–90). The environment—comprising teachers, peers, posters, announcements, written policies, and extracurricular activities—functions as a dynamic system that synergizes with formal instruction to foster the holistic acquisition of communicative proficiency in the target language.

E. The Twelve Environmental Indicators in the Questionnaire

This study is grounded in the analysis of twelve carefully selected indicators that span three dimensions: (1) human-interactive elements (e.g., teacher-student communication), (2) physical-visual components (e.g., signage and announcements), and (3) supplementary educational contexts (e.g., extracurricular activities). These indicators serve as analytical lenses to assess the extent to which the linguistic environment aligns with communicative educational objectives. Their selection was guided by pedagogical benchmarks and contemporary educational literature (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Brown, 2007; Nunan, 1999), ensuring both theoretical validity and contextual applicability.

## III. Research Methodology



### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-analytical quantitative methodology, selected for its ability to generate precise, measurable insights into learners' perceptions and attitudes toward the linguistic learning environment. It is widely recognized as one of the most appropriate approaches in educational research that seeks to evaluate participants' responses to environmental variables and their relationship to linguistic outcomes (Creswell, 2014, pp. 155–159; Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 725–729).

The central objective of this field-based inquiry is to assess the effectiveness of a simulated Arabic language environment in developing communicative competence among non-native speakers learning Arabic. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University in Brunei Darussalam, focusing specifically on first-year students enrolled in the "Communicative Arabic" course during the academic year 2024.

The research seeks to explore the extent to which immersive linguistic elements are present within the university setting and how these elements correlate with the development of learners' oral and written communication skills in a non-Arabic-speaking context.

### 3.2. Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool used in this study was a closed-ended questionnaire, designed according to the five-point Likert scale to capture levels of agreement or disagreement with twelve targeted statements. These statements were formulated to measure critical components of the Arabic language environment relevant to both formal and informal communicative contexts—such as teacher interaction, student engagement, visual signage, announcements, extracurricular activities, and written language exposure.

To ensure cultural and linguistic validity, the instrument underwent a rigorous content validation process by a panel of experts specializing in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL), thereby securing both face validity and contextual appropriateness (Fraenkel et al., 2015, pp. 125–128).

### 3.4. Population and Sample

The study population comprised all first-year students enrolled in the Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University who were registered in the Communicative Arabic course during the second semester of the 2024 academic year. The total population was 21 students.

A purposive sample of 14 students was selected, representing 66.6% of the entire population. This sampling proportion is considered statistically adequate for research conducted within small and clearly defined populations, as supported by Teddlie & Yu (2007, p. 80).

### 3.5. Statistical Analysis Procedures

The study's quantitative analysis centered on the positive agreement percentage (i.e., the combined responses of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree") as a key evaluative metric of the effectiveness of the Arabic language environment. This metric was complemented by the negative agreement percentage, which served as an indicator of educational gaps or environmental barriers.

To provide a nuanced and standardized analysis, the data were analyzed using the Weighted Percentage Method, which calculates the overall endorsement level of each statement in the questionnaire based on the Likert scale (1 to 5). The following formula was applied:

$$P (\%) = \left( \frac{N \cdot M \sum (f_i \cdot x_i)}{N \cdot M} \right) \times 100$$

Where:

- $f_i$  = frequency of each response level
- $x_i$  = Likert scale score (from 1 to 5)
- $N$  = number of respondents
- $M$  = maximum possible score (5)

This analytical technique enables precise quantitative interpretation of how well the linguistic environment supports communicative interaction. Moreover, it allows for comparative evaluation across all twelve indicators using a consistent and scientific framework (Field, 2013, pp. 65–70).

### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

All phases of the study adhered strictly to the ethical principles of educational research. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants, and full confidentiality of the collected data was assured. Participants were also informed of their voluntary involvement and that their academic evaluations would remain unaffected by their participation. These measures align with the ethical standards outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018, p. 5).

## IV. Field Study: Quantitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

### 4.1. Availability of an Arabic Environment for Daily Communication

Positive Response: 81.4%



Negative Response: 18.6%

This indicator reflects a high degree of collective awareness among students regarding the presence of a communicative Arabic environment on campus. It signifies the institutional success in providing context-rich linguistic input, aligning with Krashen's theory (1985, pp. 31–39) that emphasizes the importance of low-anxiety, high-interaction environments for natural language acquisition. Nevertheless, the 18.6% negative response suggests partial deficiencies, possibly linked to inconsistent Arabic usage across facilities or lack of motivational strategies in certain faculties.

4.2. Teacher-to-Teacher Communication in Arabic

Positive Response: 81.4%

Negative Response: 18.6%

This result, mirroring the previous indicator, highlights strong linguistic coherence within the teaching faculty. It reinforces the principle of language modeling—a key strategy in observational learning (Bandura, 1977). However, the fact that nearly one-fifth of respondents did not perceive such communication underscores the need to raise teacher awareness about consistently using the target language in all professional interactions.

4.3. Teacher-to-Student Communication in Arabic

Positive Response: 77.1%

Negative Response: 22.9%

This is a critical indicator of the environment's communicative quality, as it directly pertains to the primary conduit for language transmission. The relatively high percentage, compared to general averages in non-Arabic contexts (Nunan, 1999, p. 64), suggests robust engagement. Nonetheless, the 22.9% gap may reflect the use of Malay or English for simplification in content-heavy subjects, thereby limiting learners' exposure to authentic Arabic input.

4.4. Student-to-Teacher Communication in Arabic

Positive Response: 75.7%

Negative Response: 24.3%

Though closely aligned with the previous indicator, this result highlights a behavioral tendency—some students prefer responding in their native language. This aligns with the notion of imbalanced competence; wherein receptive abilities outpace productive skills. Thus, the study recommends implementing practical, oral-based training activities to foster more authentic, real-world communication.

4.5. Student-to-Student Communication in Arabic

Positive Response: 62.9%

Negative Response: 37.1%

This indicator represents one of the weaker aspects of the Arabic environment. Horizontal communication (among peers) is significantly less

frequent than vertical interaction (between students and teachers). This may be attributed to sociocultural factors, as students often revert to their native languages (Malay or English) in informal settings. The study calls for the integration of collaborative linguistic tasks to promote peer-to-peer Arabic usage, in line with cooperative learning strategies (Oxford, 1997, pp. 37–42).

4.6. Arabic Language Usage in Announcements

Positive Response: 75.7%

Negative Response: 24.3%

Announcements serve as an indirect visual input, playing a subtle role in linguistic exposure. While the result is generally positive, it lacks full effectiveness if diversity in design, placement, and content update is not consistently maintained.

4.7. Arabic in Official University Regulations

Positive Response: 61.4%

Negative Response: 38.6%

This figure reflects limited translation or a continued reliance on English in official documents. According to best practices in language education institutions, academic policies and student handbooks should ideally be presented in the target language (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 106). This points to a pressing need for a clearly articulated institutional language policy.

4.8. Arabic on Campus Signage

Positive Response: 67.1%

Negative Response: 32.9%

While this suggests ongoing Arabization efforts in signage, the negative percentage remains high. It may be due to a lack of coordination between departments or insufficient linguistic oversight. The study recommends establishing an internal committee responsible for Arabic signage with professional linguistic quality.

4.9. Arabic Usage in Extracurricular Activities

Positive Response: 74.3%

Negative Response: 25.7%

This indicates that Arabic is present in non-formal learning contexts, resonating with the concepts of Extended Learning and Contextualized Learning. Nonetheless, more varied and skill-integrated activities are needed to optimize these environments.

4.10. Execution of Extracurricular Activities in Arabic

Positive Response: 64.3%

Negative Response: 35.7%

This highlights a disconnect between the existence of Arabic activities and their actual implementation in Arabic. The gap may stem from students' tendency to use their native languages in informal



settings. Therefore, a formal “Language of Activity” policy should be adopted, supported by training facilitators in functional Arabic for student engagement.

#### 4.11. Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Oral Communication

Positive Response: 72.9%

Negative Response: 27.1%

This finding demonstrates a clear positive influence of non-classroom activities on oral proficiency. It supports Harmer’s conclusion (2015, pp. 115–120) that interactive, task-based activities enhance fluency, pronunciation, and linguistic confidence.

#### 4.12. Impact of Extracurricular Activities on Written Communication

Positive Response: 70%

Negative Response: 30%

Although positive, this impact is less pronounced than that observed for speaking. This is likely due to the verbal nature of most activities. The study recommends incorporating writing competitions, student newsletters, and internal administrative communication in Arabic to stimulate functional writing skills.

#### General Discussion and Thematic Interpretation

The cumulative findings of this study reveal a high degree of environmental support for Arabic language learning at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University, especially in human-interactive dimensions. Teacher-student communication (77.1%) and intra-faculty interaction (81.4%) provide ample comprehensible input, in alignment with Krashen’s model (1985, pp. 31–39). Similarly, Nunan (1999) emphasizes that authentic communicative environments serve as a foundational component in building communicative competence.

However, horizontal peer communication—both in daily interaction (62.9%) and extracurricular contexts (64.3%)—remains relatively underdeveloped. This gap reflects a socio-pragmatic limitation, likely influenced by the ease of reverting to the mother tongue in informal discourse. Such behavior has been previously identified as a major barrier to target-language use in multilingual environments (Alptekin, 2002, p. 60; Harmer, 2015, pp. 123–124).

With regard to the textual/visual environment, the data reveals a moderate presence of Arabic across official materials and signage, ranging from 61.4% to 75.7%. While commendable, this does not yet fulfill the criteria of a fully immersive linguistic ecosystem, as advocated by Nation & Macalister (2010, p. 106). The lack of visual saturation

weakens the overall perception of linguistic identity on campus.

Extracurricular activities appear to exert a stronger influence on oral communication (72.9%) than on written skills (70%). This corresponds with the typically verbal nature of such activities—such as debates, speeches, and interactive presentations. The relatively lower impact on writing skills can be attributed to the absence of complementary written outputs. This suggests an imbalance in skill development within the broader framework of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

**Summary Observations from Quantitative Analysis**  
**Consistency of Overall Pattern:** The general distribution indicates a highly favorable linguistic environment, with most indicators exceeding 70%, affirming the viability of current educational programs.

**Variation Across Dimensions:** Human-interactive indicators show greater strength than material-visual components, highlighting the need to reinforce non-interactive elements such as signage, regulations, and bulletin boards.

**Formal vs. Informal Use:** A noticeable gap exists between formal, classroom-based Arabic use and informal settings. This underscores the importance of integrating Arabic usage into students’ everyday campus culture, beyond structured instruction.

## V. Findings, Suggestions, and Recommendations

### 5.1. Key Findings

The field study yielded a series of pivotal findings that illuminate the dynamics of the Arabic language environment at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University. The most salient results can be summarized as follows:

- **Strength of the Human-Interactive Environment:**

The data reveal robust linguistic interaction in Arabic between instructors (81.4%) and between instructors and students (77.1%), indicating a rich presence of “comprehensible input” within a low-anxiety, high-interaction environment—an essential condition for natural language acquisition as proposed by Krashen (1985, pp. 31–39). Student responses to teachers in Arabic (75.7%) also reflect a high degree of communicative engagement, although some students continue to rely on their native languages, suggesting a gap in productive competence.

- **Relative Weakness in Peer-to-Peer Communication:**



Arabic communication among students themselves registered the lowest rate (62.9%), revealing a gap in horizontal interaction. This shortcoming is likely due to the absence of structured collaborative programs designed to foster Arabic-language peer engagement (Oxford, 1997, pp. 37–42).

- Partial Presence of Textual/Visual Environment:

The Arabization of visual components within the university showed varied implementation. While Arabic was moderately present in public announcements (75.7%), only 61.4% of university regulations were available in Arabic, indicating weaknesses in visual language strategy (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 106).

- Tangible Impact of Extracurricular Activities:

Extracurricular activities were found to significantly enhance oral communication skills (72.9%) and, to a lesser extent, writing abilities (70%). This discrepancy may be attributed to the predominantly verbal and interactive nature of these activities, thus necessitating the integration of structured writing components into future programming.

### 5.2. Suggestions

Based on these findings, the study proposes the following actionable suggestions:

- Enhancing the Official Textual Environment:

Adopt a comprehensive institutional language policy that mandates full Arabization of regulations, signage, and administrative materials, aligning with the vision of a fully immersive linguistic environment (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 106).

- Strengthening Horizontal Student Interaction:

Design targeted collaborative activities to promote Arabic usage among students, such as peer discussions, academic clubs, and cultural exchange programs (Oxford, 1997, pp. 40–42).

- Training Instructors in Language Modeling:

Conduct professional development workshops to reinforce the use of Arabic in all day-to-day faculty interactions, emphasizing the importance of role modeling in observational learning (Bandura, 1977).

- Restructuring Extracurricular Programming:

Incorporate functional writing tasks into extracurricular activities—such as student journalism, report writing, and internal administrative correspondence—to foster balanced

communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

- Mandating Arabic Use in All Non-Formal Programs:

Institutionalize Arabic as the official language of all extracurricular programs, and train activity supervisors to manage and facilitate events using level-appropriate functional Arabic.

### 5.3. Strategic Recommendations

Grounded in the study's findings and suggestions, the following institutional-level recommendations are proposed:

- Develop a Comprehensive University Language Policy:

Establish Arabic as the official medium for all academic, administrative, and communicative practices within the university.

- Redesign the Campus Visual Landscape:  
Enhance the university's linguistic identity by fully Arabizing visual materials—including signs, announcements, and bulletin boards—with regular and professional updates.

- Launch the “Arabic Campus Initiative”:  
Establish a university-wide program focused on transforming the campus into a fully Arabic-speaking environment, structured around four core pillars: (a) professional training, (b) daily communication, (c) Arabic content production, and (d) language-rich extracurricular activities.

- Incentivize Arabic Usage Among Students:  
Introduce a reward-based point system or academic incentives for students who demonstrate consistent and effective use of Arabic in both formal and informal contexts.

- Implement Systematic and Periodic Evaluation:

Conduct comprehensive, semester-based assessments of the linguistic environment using both quantitative and qualitative metrics to ensure ongoing refinement and sustainable improvement.

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