



## The Existence of Arabic Learning in Universities amid the COVID-19 Outbreak: Opportunities and Challenges

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**Abstract:** The Arabic language has peculiarity and differentiating characteristics that distinguish it from other foreign languages. This study investigates the existence of Arabic language learning during the pandemic period by conducting a thorough review of the Arabic language learning process from both an internal and an external standpoint. The method of writing this article is based on a study of literature comparison. The author conducts an online search for primary literature using valid criteria, and a reputable source—data analysis is performed using the content analysis paradigm. This study demonstrated the positive impact on the internal environment: 1) Lecturers and students gained greater proficiency in using applications that can be integrated into the learning process. 2) The assignment method changes from academic to project-based assignments, 3) Students become more proficient in using social media as tools for learning. 4) Arabic learning occurs from any location and at any time of day. The internal negative consequences are as follows: 1) memorizing qawaid or tashrif, in which case it is not easy to assess students' abilities through online instruction without face-to-face interaction; 2) Explanation of the material when face to face is considered more straightforward; 3) Unstable networks cause the inability to concentrate and focus. The external consequences are as follows: 1) a large number of linguistic webinars about Arabic, 2) The number of research references, research articles, and scientific journals are growing; 3) It is becoming easier to hold memorandums of understanding between collages from different regions.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; existence; opportunities; learning Arabic; challenges

### A. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 Pandemic is a health crisis that has infected millions of people in more than 200 countries globally and caused many deaths (Shereen et al., 2020). The disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 or SARS-cOv-2 was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (Cluver et al., 2020). World Health



Organization (WHO) has declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Fauzi et al., 2020). COVID-19 Pandemic affects almost all aspects of life, including education. In this condition, education's role and position in values are crucial (Bakhtiar, 2016). Many countries have decided to eliminate learning in schools (George W. Contreras, 2020). Education is one of the sectors that has been dramatically affected by COVID-19. Almost all countries eliminate activities at school where students and teachers can act as carriers and spreaders of disease without an indication.

Based on the ABC News report on March 7, 2020, school closings occurred in more than dozens of countries due to COVID-19. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data, 39 countries have closed schools with 421,388,462 students affected. In contrast, the number of students in universities at risk of being affected is 86,034,287 people. In Indonesia, many campuses and schools have implemented policies for distance learning activities or online lectures. Previously, both in Indonesia and globally, the government announced that the National Examination in 2020 was officially abolished, starting from Elementary School to Senior High School levels. All levels of education from Elementary School to universities under the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia and those under the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia have felt a significant impact. Thus, in April 2020, more than 400 million students worldwide are required to study at home. School administrators, teachers, and students make efforts in various ways to adapt to the new online learning environment (Stacey, et al., 2004).

The impact of physically closing educational institutions and replacing learning from home as a government policy changes the learning system from face-to-face to distance learning (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020). Education managers, teaching staff, and students must migrate to digital or online learning systems, better known as e-learning (Wahyono et al., 2020) or online learning. The use of information technology is constructive in the online learning process due to COVID-19. Advances in information technology can connect students with teachers through e-learning. Especially at colleges, various efforts are made so that the learning process can still be carried out. Mixed media are used to support the learning process, such as WhatsApp group, google classroom, google Docs, google form, or zoom. The learning process has unavoidable



changes. The use of technology is needed from various aspects. The creativity of teachers in managing distance classes is also important. Facilities and infrastructure are benchmarks for success (Ilmiani, Hamidah, et al., 2020).

Similar to learning Arabic in Indonesia, the characteristics of Arabic, which are unique and different from other foreign languages, have become a scourge for the entire academic community, especially with the conditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic, both teachers and students feel the impact in terms of education. The positive and negative effects become two sides of the coin. This study is significant and needs to be carried out to anticipate the challenges of learning Arabic in the future and an opportunity to transform learning that is sensitive to the times, developments in science and technology, and the context. The COVID-19 Pandemic can be a starting point in developing the potential for learning Arabic. This article aims to explore learning Arabic in collages during the COVID-19 Pandemic in terms of two different sides, its positive and negative impacts, as well as the challenges and opportunities in learning Arabic at this time.

Many previous studies on online learning in collages, such as Jamaluddin's research, stated that more than six learning media were used during this Pandemic, and the majority (60%) used Google Classroom. More than 60% of respondents are accustomed to learning with an online system. Hence, as many as 50% stated that an online system could simplify learning and mentoring in current conditions (Jamaluddin et al., 2020). It was also stated in Tabiin's research that the advantage of using the Google Classroom application was that it made it easier for teachers to create, share and group each assignment without using paper (Tabiin, n.d.). This activity makes learning more effective, teachers and students can interact at any time through the Google Classroom online class, and students can learn, listen, read, send assignments from a distance (Wicaksono & Rachmadyanti, 2017). According to Astini, what makes Google Classroom so popular is making automatic copies of assignments that students have created. Teachers can also check every assignment that students have collected in the virtual class. (Astini, 2020).

Besides the Google Classroom application, video conferencing is also the primary communication alternative so the learning process can be carried out optimally (Kusuma et al., 2020). The Zoom application is the learning media in video



conferencing, which is often used in the learning process. The results of Brahma's research (Brahma, 2020) show that the Zoom application is an alternative learning media that can accommodate the needs of teachers and students to meet face to face quickly in the learning process. Since COVID-19 spread, the use of the Zoom app is growing up to 80% faster than usual.

Likewise, the WhatsApp application, one of the most popular communication media used today, suddenly changes its function as a practical and easy-to-use learning media whenever and wherever it is (Baishya & Maheshwari, 2020). WhatsApp is developing and updating features; various features in this application include Web-Based WhatsApp for Computers. This feature makes it easy for users to share specific files and synchronize with smartphones and computers. Teachers use it to share learning material and collect students' assignments sent back into the WhatsApp group (Anwar & Riadi, 2017). The use of video tutorials, as research conducted by Batubara (Batubara & Batubara, 2020), can also be used as a learning medium. His research stated that using video tutorials as a learning medium obtained a response assessment with a score of 4.09, which means very good. The assessment of the response includes: relative advantage, which is worth 4.29 (outstanding), suitability which is worth 4.20 (good); a complexity which is valued at 3.83 (good); the trial, which is worth 3.84 (good), and the observability is good—worth 4.28 (very good).

From the data above, they explain that even in pandemic conditions, the learning situation that must change drastically in a short time has a significant impact on the learning model, which requires us to take advantage of learning technology. Besides, the development of various learning media platforms also allows teachers to be more creative, responsive and maximize any media used in the distance learning process. It is known that one of the keys to the effectiveness of an online learning system is, how a teacher remains creative to present (online) learning in a fun and easy to understand manner so that students do not feel bored and remain productive learning from home (Nasir et al., 2020).

Distance learning using various methods, strategies, and media has been proven to be effective so that the learning process can run properly. A survey conducted by Hikmah et al. In her article stated that online learning using the Zoom and WhatsApp applications was effectively carried out for theoretical courses (Hikmat et al., 2020).



The use of WhatsApp for learning purposes is also considered adequate to positively impact combining it with other methods or strategies in the online learning process (Darmalaksana et al., 2020). Google classroom is an application that is often used because it is effective, flexible, practical, and can improve learning outcomes. (Lestari, n.d.). The results obtained from Hasanah's research (Hasanah et al., 2020) also show that students' online learning activities during the COVID-19 emergency response period over the policy of studying at home are "quite good". A variety of online media has never been used before, making students adapt to technology and mastery of media. The most popular online learning media are WhatsApp and Google Classroom (Zhafira et al., 2020). Besides, Yulianto said that online learning adapted the concept of Community of Inquiry compared to face-to-face learning. It indicates that students feel the teacher's presence more in online learning than face-to-face learning. The close relationship between students and teachers is considered an indicator of quality for online learning and is very important in the success and retention of learners (Yulianto et al., 2020). This is because short online discussions are easier to understand and make participants feel comfortable talking in online conversations.

However, in the middle of the spread of various learning media, obstacles and hindrances have to be faced due to online learning. Different perceptions appear, including those expressed by Aswasulasikin related to student responses about online learning activities carried out for approximately three months. He used a response questionnaire that was distributed to students randomly. The data shows that online activities are saturated and dull, so it is hoped that lecturers will be more creative and innovative in utilizing the media used to make the learning process more enjoyable (Aswasulasikin, 2020). Online using a variety of advanced features cannot replace the role of lecturers through face-to-face lectures because it provides more motivation and enthusiasm for students to learn than taking courses through online patterns. When students are asked about their understanding of the material, it can be understood as many as one student answers very well understood, 23 students answered understood, 34 students, answered sometimes understood, and four students answered not understood. All of the students, or 100%, choose face-to-face courses compared to online lectures (Anhusadar, 2020). According to research (Satrianingrum & Prasetyo, 2020), inadequate facilities and infrastructure, insufficient material delivery, the burden



of purchasing internet quota, slow internet connection, visual learning styles, and teachers unable to control student activities were significantly challenging.

These two sides are representations of our current learning conditions. The learning system is "forced" to change in a short time. Some people can adapt quickly, but some people struggle and get stuck. Some assume it is a challenge, and others take this chance as an opportunity. In this regard, this article aims to explore learning Arabic during this Pandemic, especially in Arabic learning activities in collages during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Learning Arabic, which previously had unique problems that were more complex, then what about the situation in its current condition. This review will focus on learning Arabic during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesian Collages, alongside the challenges and opportunities faced and strategic solutions in the future.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This article was written using the comparative literature and content analysis study. Literature analysis is carried out to reveal various theories and information relevant to the topic being studied. The stages of research approach and research design used in the study comparative literature studies are conducted by browsing primary literature online, namely journals, research reports, activity reports, books, magazines, news media, and other sources with valid and reputable criteria. The journals, proceedings, and books used are prioritized from the Scopus database (<https://www.scopus.com/home.uri>) and the ERIC Institute of Education (<https://eric.ed.gov/>). Literature is also obtained from Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.co.id/>), specifically Indonesian language literature, literature published in Indonesia, and literature written by Indonesian authors. Other literature is searched using the Google search engine. The keywords used to explore the literature use English, namely COVID-19, COVID and education, Pandemic and education, outbreak and learning, teaching in the Pandemic, outbreak and education, and learning technology and the pandemic era. The keywords used to browse the literature use Indonesian, namely *COVID-19 di Indonesia, Pembelajaran dan COVID-19, pendidikan masa bencana, pembelajaran masa wabah, dosen, mahasiswa dan COVID-19, tantangan pendidikan masa depan, dan pembelajaran daring dan COVID-19.*



The stages in the comparative literature used in making this article refer to Zed (2004) and Khatibah (Khatibah, 2011). Four steps must be taken, namely (1) preparing equipment for assessment: in the form of a pencil/pen, notebook, and computer/laptop connected to the internal network; (2) compiling selected or appropriate (actually used) bibliographies; (3) managing time and focus on activities to reduce or even avoid refraction; and (4) read carefully, take notes, and write down the results. Data analysis using the content analysis paradigm. Presentation of data using informal presentation methods. The informal presentation method presents data in formulations with familiar words/phrases following linguistic rules. In presenting the data, the authors include quotes from various references used, in the form of analysis results, mentioning sources and illustrated based on a summary or essence of information (which may be in different paraphrases but still the same meaning) for each topic analyzed. This is done in the context of critical thinking and in-depth analysis of information.

## C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The COVID-19 Pandemic has accelerated the transition from face-to-face learning to distance learning, making more excellent technology use. Arabic education, particularly in Indonesian colleges, has both positive and negative consequences both internally and externally. According to the findings of the study, the COVID-19 Pandemic has had the following impact on the learning of Arabic, particularly in Indonesian colleges: First and foremost, the process of learning Arabic in lectures has a potentially hazardous impact on the individual. In this instance, both lecturers and students experience the euphoria of learning Arabic and their difficulties while participating in distance learning. The following are examples of the positive impact that lecturers and students of the Arabic Language Education study program have experienced: First, media becomes more familiar to lecturers and students. Various applications can be used as learning media in a variety of situations. The learning process activities become more diverse as a result of the use of learning technology tools. The Google Classroom application is used to keep track of all of the assignments and make sure they are completed on time. Face-to-face instruction is carried out through the Zoom Meeting application, and communication is carried out through the



Whatsapp Group application. A variety of learning applications can be used simultaneously, and numerous other platforms can be used as a forum for learning to supplement this. This information has been gathered through various types of research, which has been uploaded in (Arti 2020; Astini 2020; Darmalaksana et al. 2020; Machfauzia 2020; Suwandi 2020).

Second, Arabic assignment methods are becoming more diverse, whereas traditionally, lecturers' assignments are limited to practicing theoretical questions. They have evolved into more practical and applicable project assignments, such as creating interactive videos, online learning media, and e-modules. Students can create scientific papers or assignments in the form of interactive videos, as several lecturers have done in research (Ahmadi and Ilmiani 2020). According to this study, the assignment was created using a project-based approach, and the assessment was conducted using Google Classroom media. Thirdly, students can improve their social media usage. Instagram has the potential to be used as a teaching tool. Because the content created on Youtube is used as part of lecture assignments, it becomes a medium for developing teaching materials. Finally, Arabic learning can occur anywhere and anytime, without regard for time or place constraints. Lecturers and students can both benefit from learning while performing other tasks. The use of YouTube media can serve as a resource for students. Additionally, it can serve as a forum for students to share completed assignments.

While lecturers and students of Arabic Language Education study programs experience the following negative consequences: First, teaching Arabic language courses via learning media such as the Google Classroom application, Whatsapp Groups, and Zoom Meetings is a "new thing" for lectures. This is because Arabic language instruction continues to be taught through traditional or passive methods that require face-to-face contact. Not without reason, but because Arabic language courses, such as the Nahwu and Sharf courses, are notoriously tricky, a teacher may occasionally require students to memorize qawaid or tashrif. In this case, conducting business online without meeting in person is difficult. Additionally, students believe that learning Nahwu and Sharf is challenging to explain online. Students are less adaptable in their questioning about Nahwu and Sharf learning, and their level of concentration is lower than in face-to-face Nahwu and Sharf learning. This is also supported by Marsiah et al. research (Marsiah, Mubarak, and Audina 2021). Second, students enrolled in various



Arabic Language Education study programs express dissatisfaction with online learning. This source is derived from research findings (Jundi 2020; Supendi 2021). They believe that certain language courses, such as Nahwu and Sharf courses, are better suited for direct instruction. Third, students become dissatisfied and frustrated with distance learning, which is attributed to visual monotone learning, an inability to facilitate interactions between lecturers and students, as well as between students themselves, and also to the fact that teaching materials are not provided concurrently, resulting in decreased concentration. This source is taken from the results of research (Kosim et al. 2020). The last, Network instability; they cannot participate in online classes when wifi or network is not connected quota which is the primary need in online learning made improvident. This source is taken from the results of research (Astini 2020; Darmalaksana et al. 2020).

**Second**, the impact of the COVID-19 on learning Arabic in higher education in external is as follows: *First*, many online webinars (web seminars) are held by each university, such as training, national seminars, international seminars, book reviews, studies, board appointments, and even meetings. In learning Arabic, especially under the auspices of the IMLA organization (Ittihadu Mudaris Al-lughah Al-Arabiyyah), many universities are working together to carry out national and international seminars. This webinar activity is widely held considering much cheaper costs because it does not require transportation or consumption and can also be attended by participants outside the region and even abroad. Since March 2020 various webinars have been carried out by universities collaborate with the IMLA (Association of Arabic Teachers in Indonesia) including:

**Table 1. Online Seminars on Arabic Teaching and Learning**

No	Types of Seminar	Organizer Cooperation	Theme of the seminar	Invited Speakers
1	International	IMLA Center		Abu Sholih Anis Luqman an-nadwi
2	International	IMLA Center	Map of the Teaching Arabic as a Second Language	Walid Al-Sayed (Director of the Al Diwan Center for Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages and Coordinator of the Arabic Department at Sultan



				Muhammad Al-Fatih Endowment University in Turkey
3	International	IMLA Center	International Evaluation Standards	Dr. Islam Yasri Ali alhadiqi Turkey
4	International	PBA UIN Suska Riau		Prof. Dr. Ahmad Mosthafa Azizi (Professor of the Emirates Arabiyah University Abu Dhabi) and Abdul Aziz Abdul Shomad (Arabic Fusha Activist from Saudi Arabia)
5	International	Faculty of Language and Arts, the State University of Jakarta in collaboration with the Arabic and Middle East Language Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics Universiti Malaya		Dr. Haji Mohammad bin Seman (Universiti Malaya), Dr. Shafruddin Tajuddin, M. A (State University of Jakarta) and Prof. Dr. Zuriyati, M. Pd. (State University of Jakarta)
6	International	Padjadjaran University	Welcoming Arabic Language Learning in the Post-Pandemic COVID-19 Era	
7	International	IAIN Pontianak		Ust. Dr. Sholeh Sabu'i from Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University, Brunei Darussalam and Dr. Median Mukhlas

The second, many studies, scientific papers, and published articles related to learning Arabic during the COVID-19 Pandemic, among others: Learning Arabic Online: Problems, solutions, and hopes by Kosim, Nanang, and Turmudi, Imam and Maryani, Novy and Hadi, Abdul (2020). The Effectiveness of Online Learning Models in Arabic Language Lectures at the Islamic Institute of Sunan Kalijogo Malang by Sholihatul Atik Hikmawati Islamic Institute of Sunan Kalijogo Malang (2020). Use of Video Tutorials to Support Online Learning During the Corona Virus Pandemic by Hamdan Husein Batubara, Delila Sari Batubara (2020). Application of Electronic Media in Learning Arabic by Luluk Humairo Pimada and Muhammad Afif Amrulloh, (2020). It is easy to hold a collaboration (MOU) between Arabic Language Education study



programs with other colleges outside the region and also abroad because it does not require transportation costs and can also communicate via email and WhatsApp.

### **Discussion**

Learning through new technology has been going on for decades. Arabic language activists must adapt to digital era technology. Learning in the future will be more modern. However, it can be said that the expected transformational impact has not been achieved. The online learning process transformed the teacher into a conduit for knowledge transmission and a leader and companion through practical guidance and communication. These two objects resemble two metal sides placed side by side. The COVID-19 Pandemic is not only a disaster but also a teaching moment. Our current condition is a challenge and an opportunity to create opportunities to develop and prepare for better Arabic learning. According to Wijaya the various impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic allow us to study more deeply as a reference in preparing for future Arabic lessons. (Astini, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2020). Talk about effects, then talk about two different sides. The first is a positive impact, and the second is a negative impact. A significant positive effect is felt in the process of learning Arabic internally.

This is directly related to the lecture process between lecturers and students of the Arabic Language Education study program. In this condition, Arabic language learning has changed in terms of delivery and learning media. Online learning changes the Arabic learning style, which previously the majority used conventional methods and media. Lecturers and students are required to adapt. PBA lecturers adopt various kinds of learning media by utilizing learning technology, and students quickly adapt to learning media (Ilmiani, Ahmadi, et al., 2020) and (Ahmadi, 2014). This shows that PBA lecturers have become more competent, creative, and productive in making teaching materials. In his research, Luh revealed that online learning allows lecturers and students to be more innovative and creative (Luh Sri Damayanti, 2020). Technology use is hoped that effective and exciting learning will be born so that the learning process can occur optimally. The project-based assignment method is also more interesting for students than the theoretical-based assignment (Pujiasih, 2020).

According to Sudiran et al., online assignments or project-based assignments will be more useful in the future for students (Building Optimism, Hacking New lives in a world of Education, n.d.). Therefore, students will be free to develop their creativity



according to their talents and interests (Hasanah et al., 2020). And the most important thing in online learning can save time and space because it can be done anytime and anywhere. Lecturers and students can interact even when far apart (Darmalaksana et al., 2020) and (Moore et al., 2011). But in the middle of online learning optimization efforts, of course, there are constraints and negative impacts felt by PBA lecturers and students. Online learning cannot be done intensively; Arabic learning has unique characteristics. In the Arabic language course, the teaching skills of seeing the condition of students are needed to teach several essential points in Arabic courses (Rahmawati & Putri, 2020) and (Wajdi et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, not all senior lecturers are proficient in using IT. The majority of senior teachers face problems when using technology. They are more bothered with preparing the media than teaching effectiveness (Fuadi et al., 2020). This lack of teacher readiness also has an impact on the psychological condition of students. They are starting to get bored with the learning process that is only done virtually. There is no two-way communication between lecturers and students. Students only become passive listeners, and it is difficult to control the activities of students during distance learning (Azzahra, 2020) and (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

A significant impact was also felt in learning Arabic externally, the appearance of various webinars during the Pandemic since the implementation of WFH (Work from Home) to stay active and productive at home. Many educational institutions take advantage of this opportunity to carry out activities, such as workshops or seminars, without gathering many people in one place. Webinars are website programs that provide communication media from one person to communicate with many people as an audience. In this case, a speaker can convey information to many participants, even though they are not in the same place. Webinars are a place for seminars and interactive conversation features that each participant can carry out with the speaker (George W. Contreras, 2020). In this webinar, each participant can ask questions about the previous speaker's material so that the discussion between them can be well established.

Of course, this interactive service is supported by each device's intelligent equipment, such as a microphone for recording sound and a camera as an image recorder that can function correctly. One of the benefits of a webinar program is that it can be played back. We can easily find webinar events searched only by using Google



because webinars are also designed with SEO optimization to make searching easier. That way, we can revisit the seminar topics, discussions, and conclusions obtained from the seminar. Arabic webinar activities can be held and present native speakers or speakers only by using the internet. This is, of course, very profitable because it is without expense.

Research about COVID-19, effects of COVID-19, and handling of COVID-19 have been ongoing since the first time this outbreak spread (Wardhana, 2020). In-depth policy review in various scientific disciplines and the essential thing about cross-disciplinary studies can minimize policy contradictions. At the same time, the study of education and learning during a pandemic needs attention—especially the study of learning Arabic. Various research articles, scientific journals, papers, and research are conducted during a pandemic (Johnson, 2000; Takao, 2020). Euphoria about studies and writings on learning during the Pandemic will be an interesting reference and have significant progress.

Making MOU among collages is also easier. Communication via email and WhatsApp helps accelerate the follow-up of cooperation without physical interaction (Mulyanto, 2020). The Arabic language education program does not miss this opportunity to expand MOU and consolidate academic relations at domestic and foreign universities.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic, our education system must be ready to leap to transform online learning for all teachers and students. We are entering a new era to build creativity, hone skills, and improve self-quality by changing our interaction systems, perspectives, and patterns with technology. Learning Arabic faces several real challenges that must be immediately resolved, technological imbalances, limited competence of teachers or students in the use of learning applications, and limited resources for learning technology such as the internet and quotas. Our education, especially in learning Arabic which must catch up with online learning rapidly. In fact, not all technically and systems are ready. So far, online learning is only a concept, as a technical tool, not as a way of thinking, as a learning paradigm. Online learning is not a method for changing face-to-face learning with digital applications, nor is it burdening



students with tasks that pile up every day. Online learning should encourage teachers and students to be creative, access as many sources of knowledge as possible, produce works, hone insights, and ultimately shape students into lifelong learners. From these challenges, we must dare to take steps to make online learning an opportunity to transform our Arabic learning. So that learning Arabic is not left behind and one of the opportunities for academics to improve the quality of learning Arabic, both theoretically and practically. The researcher realizes that in making this scientific paper, there are still many shortcomings. Therefore, it is hoped that further research can add to other findings related to the opportunities and challenges of learning Arabic over a distance.

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