Problems and Challenges in The Teaching of Arabic Poetry in Malaysia
(Permasalahan dan Cabaran dalam Pengajaran Puisi Arab di Malaysia)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the issues and challenges in the teaching of Arabic poetry in Malaysia through a library-based literature review approach. Focus is given to the misalignment of poetic texts with learners' context, pedagogical limitations among teachers, students' negative attitudes toward poetry, and the lack of interactive teaching aids. The findings reveal that conventional methods emphasizing memorization and literal translation fail to build student appreciation for the literary values of Arabic poetry. The study proposes the adoption of interactive and contextual pedagogical approaches, including the use of technology (e.g., e-Diwan), project-based learning, and poetry visualization tools. It also recommends that teacher training and curriculum design be revised to better meet the needs of contemporary learners.

Keywords: Arabic Poetry, Teaching and Learning, Pedagogical Strategy, Digital Teaching Aids

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menganalisis permasalahan dan cabaran dalam pengajaran puisi Arab di Malaysia berdasarkan pendekatan analisis kepustakaan. Penekanan diberikan terhadap isu pemilihan teks puisi yang tidak sejajar dengan latar pelajar, kekangan dalam pendekatan pengajaran guru, sikap negatif pelajar terhadap puisi serta kekurangan bahan bantu interaktif dalam PdP. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pendekatan konvensional yang menekankan hafalan dan penterjemahan literal gagal membina apresiasi pelajar terhadap nilai sastera puisi Arab. Kajian ini mencadangkan pelaksanaan pendekatan pedagogi interaktif dan kontekstual seperti penggunaan teknologi (contohnya, e-Diwan), pembelajaran berasaskan projek dan visualisasi puisi untuk meningkatkan keberkesanan PdP. Kajian ini turut menyarankan agar kurikulum dan latihan guru disemak semula agar selaras dengan keperluan pelajar masa ini.

Kata kunci: Puisi Arab, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran, Strategi Pedagogi, Bahan Bantu Digital

INTRODUCTION

Arabic poetry (*al-shi'r al-'Arabī*) is a significant literary medium in Arab-Islamic civilization, playing a vital role in conveying cultural values, history, and rhetorical knowledge. It not only enhances linguistic sensitivity but also enriches students' vocabulary and structural understanding (Rahman & Ibrahim, 2018). In Malaysia, Arabic poetry is taught in various educational contexts, including STAM, religious schools, and degree programs at public universities. However, the teaching and learning process (T&L) of Arabic poetry continues to face challenges such as pedagogical limitations, inappropriate text selection, and students' low appreciation of the genre (Osman & Mahmoud, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Functions and Importance of Arabic Poetry

Traditionally, Arabic poetry served as a primary medium for recording history, moral values, life philosophies, and the identity of Arab society. Since pre-Islamic times, poetry has been used to document important events, express social critique, and showcase tribal greatness. According to Kadir (2001), classical Arabic poetry contains high aesthetic values that foster a love for the language and shape the cultural and belief systems of Arab communities. In modern education, Arabic poetry is a tool for training students to understand implicit meanings, symbolism, and figurative language. Rahman and Ibrahim (2018) state that poetry education strengthens critical skills, linguistic appreciation, and the ability to interpret high-level language structures. It also develops students' sensitivity to tone, rhythm, and emotion in Arabic communication. Therefore, Arabic poetry should be positioned as a core component in developing linguistic and cultural competencies in Arabic education in Malaysia.

Pedagogical Issues and Teaching Strategies

Arabic poetry teaching in Malaysia remains confined to conventional methods that offer limited space for creativity and student engagement. Osman and Mahmoud (2022) found that most teachers rely on memorization and literal translation as the primary teaching techniques, rendering poetry static and inaccessible. The lack of teacher training in literary pedagogy results in the absence of interactive approaches such as reader-response analysis, dramatization, or creative reading. Mustapha and Toklubok (2022) reported that high-performing students engage better with poetry when involved in personal and reflective experiences. This highlights the need for teacher retraining in Arabic literary strategies to meet 21st-century learners' needs. Strategies like group work, poetry presentations, and theatrical performance can deepen students' understanding and appreciation of Arabic poetry.

Student Challenges: Language and Motivation

One of the biggest challenges in learning Arabic poetry is linguistic complexity and low student motivation. Classical Arabic poetry employs archaic vocabulary, unfamiliar sentence structures, and symbolic language, often difficult to interpret. Mustapha and Toklubok (2022) noted that the cognitive pressure to comprehend poetry leads to student disinterest and lack of confidence. Moreover, students do not perceive poetry as having practical value in modern life, contributing to their disregard for the genre. Abdullah and Omar (2016) also emphasized that Arabic rhetoric instruction remains overly theoretical, failing to link directly with literary texts. Students struggle to apply concepts such as *tashbīh*, *isti'ārah*, and *kināyah* in real poetic contexts, making learning too abstract. This calls for a transformation in rhetorical teaching, integrating it practically with poetry instruction to enhance comprehension and student motivation.

Teaching Aids and Technology

Digital technology developments have opened avenues for innovation in Arabic poetry instruction. Osman and Mahmoud (2022) introduced the *e-Diwan* application, enabling students to listen to native recitations and access interactive translations and visualizations of verses. This helps students grasp not just meaning, but also intonation, emotion, and aesthetic structure. Visual tools like mind maps, as shown in Atoh, Ramli, and Sarudin (2020), assist students in linking verses to themes, emotions, and deeper meanings. Additionally, project-based learning- such as composing poetry, singing renditions, or producing performance videos can foster deeper literary engagement. Therefore, integrating technology and visual strategies should be encouraged as part of pedagogical reform in Arabic poetry instruction in Malaysia.

Methodology

This study employed a literature review approach. Sources analyzed included journal articles, doctoral theses, and research papers published between 2000 and 2024. Data were analyzed thematically using content analysis methods, focusing on themes such as text content issues, pedagogical approaches, student motivation, and learning technology. The findings were classified into four key categories: poetry text selection, teaching approach limitations, student attitudes and engagement, and the limited use of technology.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Text Selection Issues

The issue discussed in this section is a crucial component in examining the reality of Arabic poetry instruction in Malaysia. One of the most significant concerns is the selection of poetic texts that do not align with students' language proficiency, cultural background, and cognitive ability. The texts commonly used are predominantly from the pre-Islamic (Jāhilīyah) or classical periods such as the Abbasid era, featuring complex language structures and symbolism. This classical language style no longer matches the semantic and syntactic developments typically found in contemporary Arabic. According to Kadir (2001), classical texts require a deep understanding of historical context, the culture of Arabic poetry, and archaic grammatical structures, such as the use of the passive verb (*fiʿl majhūl*), nominal sentences (*jumlah ismiyyah*), and unconventional rhetorical arrangements. Without the inclusion of glossaries or annotations guided by the sociocultural context, these texts become highly unfamiliar to modern students who lack Arabic cultural background.

Moreover, Rahman and Ibrahim (2018) report that in many cases, teachers rely solely on official textbook materials, which fail to consider students' diverse backgrounds and abilities. This results in passive learners, with learning becoming a mere reproductive process, lacking depth in literary interpretation. Consequently, students are less inclined to explore poetry and are unable to establish emotional or reflective connections with its content. These findings highlight the need for a more contextual, inclusive selection of texts that can be easily translated into students' current experiences. The use of contemporary poems with themes of humanity, universal values, and modern Islamic culture may help bridge the gap between poetic texts and the learning realities of Malaysian students.

Based on various scholarly sources and recent literature, it is concluded that poetry instruction should not be confined to a singular or purely traditional approach. A balance between traditional and innovative methods in language education is necessary. Additionally, since students in Malaysia come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, poetry instruction must be adapted to suit the local context. Classical texts should be accompanied by modern ones to help students relate literary values to their daily lives.

Interactive approaches such as poetry performances, creative readings, and visual exploration using mind maps, apps, and videos can engage various types of learners comprehensively. Studies also show that the effectiveness of poetry pedagogy depends on how well teachers can foster students' interest and emotional connection through authentic, experience-based activities. Hence, this study emphasizes the need for holistic reform encompassing content, approaches, teacher training, and the provision of digital teaching aids to ensure Arabic poetry remains relevant in Malaysia's education system.

Pedagogical Limitations

This section also addresses a critical aspect of Arabic poetry education in Malaysia. Pedagogy plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of Arabic poetry instruction. According to Rahman and Ibrahim (2018), most Arabic language teachers in Malaysia lack formal training in literary pedagogy. This leads to the use of teacher-centered and cognitively oriented instructional strategies. Techniques such as literal translation, vocabulary explanation, and grammar exercises continue to dominate.

Osman and Mahmoud (2022) emphasize that methods such as expressive reading, poetry dramatization, and interpretive discussions are rarely employed because teachers are not trained to apply such approaches. Time constraints, exam-oriented curriculum requirements, and the lack of resource support further compel teachers to resort to traditional methods. As a result, students are not actively engaged, are not encouraged to think analytically or aesthetically, and focus mainly on rote memorization. Teachers often fail to tailor their approaches to accommodate various student learning styles, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic preferences. The lack of collaborative and experiential strategies in the classroom hinders students

from developing a deep understanding and emotional resonance with poetic texts. Therefore, teacher training reform that emphasizes project-based, dramatic, and reflective learning approaches in Arabic literary pedagogy should be prioritized in the professional development of Arabic language educators in Malaysia.

Based on multiple scholarly sources and current literature, it can be concluded that the teaching of poetry should not rely solely on traditional methods. A balance between traditional and innovative approaches in language education is essential. Given the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Malaysian students, poetry instruction should be localized to suit contextual needs. Classical texts must be complemented with modern texts so that students can relate literary values to their everyday lives. Furthermore, interactive methods such as poetry performances, creative readings, and visual explorations using mind maps, applications, and videos can stimulate a wide range of learners. Research also indicates that the success of poetry pedagogy hinges on the teacher's ability to evoke student interest and emotion through authentic, experience-based activities. Thus, this study affirms the need for comprehensive reforms covering content, methods, teacher training, and digital teaching aids to maintain the relevance of Arabic poetry in Malaysian education.

Student Attitudes and Engagement

This section discusses an equally important aspect in exploring the current reality of Arabic poetry teaching in Malaysia. Students' attitudes toward Arabic poetry are a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. The study by Mustapha and Toklubok (2022) shows that a significant number of students perceive poetry as a difficult and unenjoyable literary form. They view poetic texts as abstract, requiring excessive connotative interpretation, and unrelated to their daily lives. Their study reveals that only 30% of students are able to comprehend poetry both literally and figuratively, with the majority merely memorizing the interpretations provided by teachers. This highlights a deficiency in approaches that allow students to form personal interpretations based on their own experiences and backgrounds.

Furthermore, the study by Abdullah and Omar (2016) indicates that rhetoric syllabi are overly theoretical and fail to relate directly to literary texts, including poetry. Concepts such as *tashbīh*, *istiʿārah*, and *jinās* are taught in isolation, without integration into actual literature, rendering the learning process abstract. When students are unable to connect rhetorical theory with poetry content, they lose motivation.

To address this, students should be given the opportunity to engage with poetry more openly, through experiential learning methods such as group discussions, interpretive presentations, and personal poetry composition. These approaches can foster affective bonds with the text and encourage students to evaluate the values and messages conveyed in poetry more deeply. Based on extensive literature, it is clear that poetry instruction cannot rely solely on traditional methods. A blend of conventional and innovative approaches is essential. Students in Malaysia come from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, thus necessitating localized instruction. Classical poetry must be supported with contemporary texts so students can link literature to their daily lives. Additionally, interactive methods such as poetry performances, creative readings, and visual tools like mind maps, apps, and videos can holistically engage different learner types. Research has shown that successful poetry pedagogy depends on the teacher's ability to cultivate students' interest and emotional engagement through authentic, experience-based activities.

Findings from Mustapha and Toklubok (2022) confirm that students have negative perceptions of Arabic poetry, viewing it as difficult, boring, and irrelevant. Only around 30% of students understood poetry both literally and figuratively. This is due to limited student engagement in the learning process and the linguistic complexity of the texts. Many students focus solely on memorizing teacher interpretations, without developing their own understanding. Additionally, Abdullah and Omar (2016) found that the rhetoric syllabus remains too theoretical and lacks application to literature, including poetry. This hinders students from perceiving the connection between rhetorical elements and poetic reading experiences. Without a personal connection to the text, student interest and engagement will continue to decline.

Limited Use of Technology

This section explores the limited incorporation of technology in Arabic poetry education in Malaysia. Based on various academic sources and recent literature, it is evident that teaching poetry should not depend solely on traditional methods. A balanced approach that incorporates innovative practices is necessary. Malaysian students come from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, requiring instruction that aligns with the local context. Classical poetry should be

accompanied by modern texts to help students relate to literature in their daily lives.

Interactive methods such as poetry performance, creative reading, and visual exploration using mind maps, apps, and videos can engage students of various learning styles. Studies have shown that the success of poetry pedagogy depends greatly on the teacher's ability to spark student interest and emotional involvement through authentic, experience-based activities.

To overcome the limitations in Arabic poetry instruction, the use of technology and alternative methods is essential. Osman and Mahmoud (2022) introduced the e-Diwan application, which integrates native speaker recitations with interactive text visualizations and translations. This method has proven effective in enhancing students' understanding of tone, intonation, and linguistic style in Arabic poetry. Furthermore, mind maps and graphic organizers, as demonstrated by Atoh, Ramli, and Sarudin (2020), help students map out meanings and poetic structures more clearly. These visual techniques assist students in identifying connections between verses, themes, and rhetorical elements. Abdullah and Omar (2016) also suggest that rhetoric instruction should adopt narrative and contextual approaches, enabling students to understand rhetorical concepts through contemporary poetic examples. Such pedagogical innovations can significantly enhance student engagement, making Arabic poetry a living, meaningful art form in modern educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the teaching and learning of Arabic poetry in Malaysia is still hindered by complex content, narrow instructional methods, and low student interest. However, the integration of technology, relevant text selection, and modern pedagogical strategies can change this perception. Collaboration between the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions, and Arabic language teachers is essential to reform Arabic poetry pedagogy to become more inclusive, communicative, and contextual. Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of evidence-based Arabic literature teaching modules.

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