

# **The Acquisition of New Arabic Vocabulary by Non-Native Speakers of Arabic: A Linguistic Study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The acquisition of new vocabulary is a critical component of language learning, particularly for international students studying Arabic because of the unique nature of the Arabic language. This research paper explores the perceptions of international students studying Arabic at the Language Center of University of Jordan of new Arabic vocabulary in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ that influence their learning process mainly the understanding of new vocabulary. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative survey and a qualitative discussion. The findings reveal that while students recognize the importance of vocabulary acquisition, they often struggle with the complexity of Arabic morphology, and the cultural context embedded in the language. It also reveals that students employ techniques and strategies to find meanings for new Arabic words as they encounter them in texts such as root memorization, in-text clues and logical guessing. The paper concludes with recommendations for educators to enhance vocabulary teaching methods and for students to adopt more effective learning strategies.

**Keywords:** Arabic vocabulary, learning strategies, vocabulary acquisition, Second language learning, Arabic for non-native speakers.

## **Introduction**

Arabic ranks among the most extensively spoken languages globally, boasting more than 300 million native speakers. It is the official language of 22 Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa region and serves as the liturgical language of Islam, spoken by over 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide (Eberhard et al. 2021). It is also the language of Quran and Islam, making it a significant language for religious and cultural studies. For international students, learning Arabic presents unique challenges, particularly in the realm of vocabulary acquisition. For non-native speakers, learning Arabic offers access to a profound cultural, religious, and intellectual heritage, as well as opportunities for professional advancement in fields such as diplomacy, international business, and academia. Developing strategies for learning new vocabulary enhances and speeds up the acquiring and learning of other skills pivotal to proper communication in the language such as writing and listening, the two skills dependent largely on the availability of a wide range of vocabulary. Catalán (2003:56) defines vocabulary learning strategies as:

knowledge about the mechanisms (processes, strategies) used in order to learn vocabulary as well as steps or actions taken by students (a) to find out the meaning of unknown words, (b) to retain them in long-term memory, (c) to recall them at will, and (d) to use them in oral or written mode.

Unlike many Indo-European languages, Arabic has a rich and complex morphological system, a vast lexicon, and a deep cultural context that can be difficult for non-native speakers to grasp (Eberhard et al. 2021). The study of Arabic by non-native speakers presents unique challenges due to its linguistic complexity, diglossic nature, and deep cultural embeddedness. Learning Arabic by non-native speakers is primarily determined by the acquisition of new vocabularies and adding them to the learner's repertoire.

Scholars in the field assert that a strong vocabulary base is crucial for attaining proficiency in a foreign language. The interconnectedness of vocabulary with fundamental language skills suggests that individuals who dedicate effort to broadening their lexical knowledge are more inclined to attain fluency and understanding in the language they are learning. (Nation and Waring 1997).

## **Research Problem**

Despite the growing number of international students studying Arabic, there is limited research on how these students perceive and acquire new vocabulary. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for developing effective teaching methodologies and learning strategies that can facilitate better language acquisition.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the main challenges international students face when learning new Arabic vocabulary?
2. What strategies do international students employ to acquire new Arabic vocabulary?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to provide an analysis of the perceptions of international students regarding new Arabic vocabulary. The findings will be valuable for educators, curriculum designers, and language learners, offering insights into how to improve vocabulary acquisition in Arabic as a foreign language.

## **Literature Review**

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of second language learning (Nation 2001). Research has shown that a large vocabulary is essential for language proficiency, as it enables learners to comprehend and produce language effectively (Schmitt 2000). However, vocabulary acquisition is not merely about memorizing words; it involves understanding their meanings, usage, and cultural connotations (Laufer 1997). Arabic presents unique challenges for vocabulary acquisition due to its morphological complexity, diglossic nature, and cultural specificity. The Arabic language has a root-based morphology, where words are derived from a set of root consonants, making it difficult for learners to recognize and remember new vocabulary (Ryding 2005). Additionally, the diglossic nature of Arabic, where Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) differs significantly from regional dialects, adds another layer of complexity (Ferguson 1959). Cognitive factors such as memory, attention, and prior language knowledge play a significant role in vocabulary acquisition (Ellis, 1994). Cultural factors, including the learner's familiarity with the cultural context of the target language, also influence vocabulary learning (Kramsch 1993).

Gu (2010) from Victoria University of Wellington conducted research on one hundred Chinese EFL students studying at pre-university English language enhancement program in Singapore. His findings suggest that at the end of the six-month course, these participants

used more varieties of vocabulary learning strategies more frequently than they did six months prior to their program, and that there was more consistency between beliefs and strategies at the end of the course. The research revealed a significant positive correlation between various vocabulary learning strategies and the size of passive vocabulary. Additionally, these strategies were also linked to the proportion of active vocabulary at the K1 level.

To address these challenges, researchers have explored various strategies for effective vocabulary acquisition. Nation (2001) emphasizes the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction, including the use of flashcards, word lists, and spaced repetition systems, which are particularly effective for memorizing Arabic roots and patterns. Contextual learning, where vocabulary is acquired through exposure to authentic texts and real-life situations, has also been shown to enhance retention and understanding (Schmitt 2000). For example, reading Arabic literature or watching Arabic media can help learners grasp the cultural and contextual nuances of new words. These strategies, when combined, provide a multifaceted approach to overcoming the challenges of Arabic vocabulary acquisition.

Vocabulary acquisition strategies are varied and multifaceted. Simanjuntak (2021) identifies reading as a key strategy, which includes techniques such as reading aloud, repetition, and engagement with social media. Also, it is suggested that students make word lists after reading, watching movies, and listening to music. The process of learning vocabulary offers significant benefits in the context of second language acquisition. Research indicates that vocabulary acquisition is a crucial component of language learning. For example, Lutfiyah et al. (2022) note that common difficulties faced by learners include challenges related to pronunciation, spelling, appropriate usage, and comprehension of vocabulary. Wilkins (1972) draws a distinction between grammar and vocabulary, asserting that second language learners can grasp the overall meaning of a message if the vocabulary is comprehensible, even in cases where the grammatical structure may be unclear.

For international students studying Arabic, grasping the cultural context is of paramount importance. This is largely due to the fact that numerous Arabic terms carry cultural and religious implications that may not be readily understood by those who are not native speakers.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The quantitative phase involves a data analysis of a text in Arabic that includes new vocabulary that students are required to know the meaning of. The quantitative level also includes a survey administered to international students studying Arabic, while the qualitative phase includes insights and discussion related to survey responds.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are 30 adult international students enrolled in intermediate Arabic language courses at the Language Center/The University of Jordan during the Summer semester of the academic year 2023/2024 in levels three and four. The sample includes students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including English, French, Spanish, Korean and Chinese speakers. Students belong to the fourth stage of language acquisition (Intermediate fluency). According to Al-Osaili (2006), the second language learner acquires about six thousand words. At this stage, the learner is able to understand the general meaning of

conversations. The learner is also able to understand reading texts, derive specific information, and know the meaning of many words and expressions with the help of certain strategies.

## **Data Collection**

### *Text*

Students are introduced to a model unified 10 lines paragraph where new vocabulary is presented. Students are then asked to provide the meaning of specific words and expressions in the text making sure they have not encountered these words before. This part is distributed and administered in class.

### *Survey*

The survey consists of 8 questions related to vocabulary learning designed to assess the participants' perceptions of new Arabic vocabulary, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use for vocabulary acquisition. Students are allowed to choose more than one possible choice. They were also allowed to write their own notes.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Mixed Method Approach**

Quantitative and qualitative analyses are used in this research as these approaches provide direct, measurable, and objective insights into the data being studied. This dual methodology allows researchers to capture a comprehensive understanding of the responses, facilitating a more nuanced interpretation of the findings. It is essential in the analysis of participants' responses as they yield first-hand measurable and objective information on the data under analysis. In this regard, the results obtained for the different responses inspected in this research are based on counts and percentages recording the frequencies of different challenges and strategies under examination. The results of the quantitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses. The analysis focuses on the challenges, strategies, and cognitive and cultural factors that influence vocabulary acquisition. Qualitative analysis serves as an essential element in interpreting the raw numerical data generated by quantitative research. Although quantitative analysis can reveal the presence of specific variables or trends through numerical values and percentages, it is the descriptive qualitative analysis that elucidates the intricate nuances related to the subject matter and findings of the study. (Rubio, 2018).

## **Results**

### **Survey Results**

#### *Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition*

The survey results indicate that the majority of participants find Arabic vocabulary acquisition challenging. The most frequently cited challenges include the complexity of Arabic morphology including the root and pattern systems (45%), prior cultural clues and connotations (65%), and the structure of the Arabic word or phrase as in idiomatic expressions (45%).

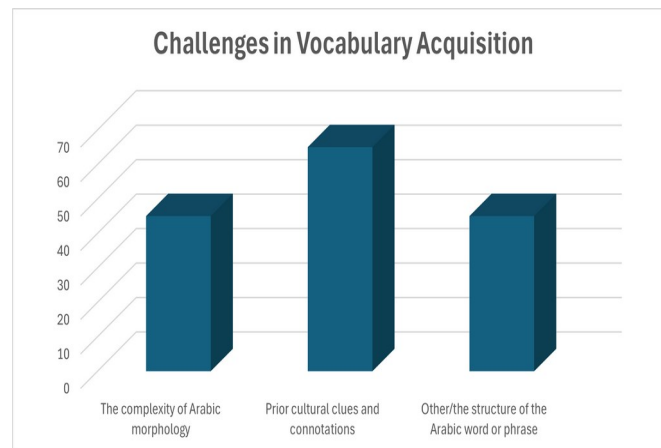


Figure 1- Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition facing non-native learners of Arabic

### *Strategies for Vocabulary Learning*

According to this study, the two most commonly used strategies for vocabulary learning among non-native speakers of Arabic according to this study include root patterns memorization (80%), and the use of context clues (70%). However, many participants also reported using some prior cultural clues and personal learning habits to aid in vocabulary acquisition (35%).

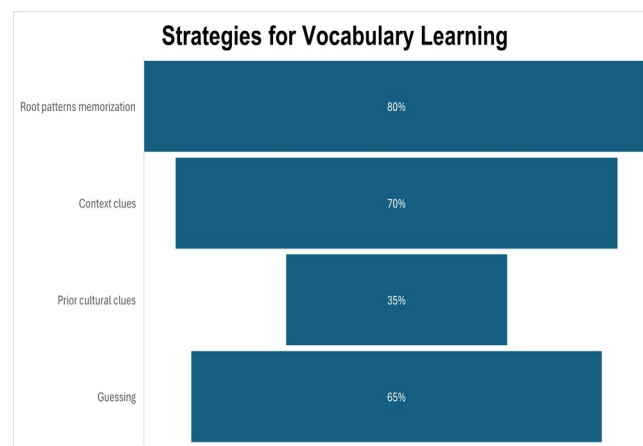


Figure 2 - Strategies for vocabulary learning used by non-native learners of Arabic

### *Cognitive and Cultural Factors*

The findings from the survey suggest that cognitive elements, such as memory in remembering the various forms of roots and patterns, play a significant role in vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, cultural factors, including the participant's familiarity with Arab culture and religion, were found to influence their ability to understand and remember new vocabulary especially when living in an Arabic speaking environment because the learner is in direct contact with the language almost all the time. These cognitive factors significantly impact how individuals learn and retain new words, highlighting their importance in educational contexts.

### **Discussion**

Vocabulary is a major component of language and a key reason for a student's linguistic development in language skills. Vocabulary is divided into two parts: The first: Single words with full meaning, including nouns, verbs, adverbs and pronouns (Richards and Renandya,

202) such as: ("قلم" (Qalam, "pen", "شَرِبَ" (shariba, "drank", "وقت" (waqt, "time", "هو" (huwa, "he", etc.).

The second is Idiomatic expressions. Richards and Renandya (2002) define idiomatic expressions as "a group of words that, when combined, convey a meaning different from their original lexical meanings, whether individually or as a compound. This meaning arises from the agreement of a linguistic community on a concept associated with this verbal combination." The term "idiomatic expressions" is one of several terms used by researchers to describe the idea of verbal collocation. Other terms include "verbal collocations," "contextual expressions," and "fixed expressions," among others. European languages have largely established a consensus regarding specific terminology; however, Arabic continues to experience a lack of such uniformity. This discrepancy can be attributed to several factors, including an ambiguous comprehension of the underlying concepts associated with the terms, variations in their translations, and a prevailing inclination among modern scholars to refrain from anchoring these terms within a cohesive framework. This classification highlights the structural and stylistic diversity of idiomatic expressions in Arabic, reflecting both their grammatical complexity and their rich metaphorical and cultural significance (Alqahtani 2015).

### Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition

The findings of this study align with previous research on the challenges of Arabic vocabulary acquisition (Ryding 2005; Ferguson 1959). Students highlighted the complexity of Arabic morphology, the vast variation in the root and pattern systems, prior cultural limitations, and the lack of cognates as major challenges. One participant noted, "Arabic words are different. While some are easy to comprehend, other are too hard which hinders my learning proves." Additionally, the cultural context embedded in Arabic vocabulary adds another layer of difficulty, as students must not only learn the words but also understand their cultural and religious connotations. The process of acquiring new vocabulary is a crucial component of learning any language; however, for non-native Arabic speakers, it poses distinct and considerable challenges. These difficulties arise from the intricate linguistic structure of Arabic, its diglossic characteristics, and the cultural and contextual subtleties inherent in the language.

The difficulty in learning new vocabulary is due to many factors according to the participants in the sample study. The first is that many of these new words are of a developmental nature. This means that the meaning of words depends on and may vary according to context, that is why a learner must be exposed to the word more than once in a variety of contexts. The process of acquiring a word begins with the initial recognition of a term, progressing towards a comprehensive understanding of its meaning, alongside an awareness of its morphological and semantic attributes. This process also involves the identification of the term's applications across different contexts. Furthermore, words frequently intersect; the comprehension of one word's meaning is frequently intertwined with the meanings of other words. This interconnectedness is illustrated through various relationships, including synonyms, associations, antonyms, and homophones. The following is an examination of the main obstacles encountered by learners in the acquisition of Arabic vocabulary.

### Root-Based Morphology

Abu-Rabia (2002) mentions that Arabic is a root-based language, where most words are derived from a set of three or four root consonants. While this system allows for the creation of a vast lexicon from a limited number of roots, it also makes vocabulary acquisition

challenging for non-native speakers. Learners must not only memorize individual words but also understand the patterns (أوزان, awzan) used to derive different forms of the word. For example, the root "كتب" (k-t-b) relates to writing, and from this root, words like "كتاب" (kitab, "book"), "مكتب" (maktab, "office"), and "كاتب" (katib, "writer") are derived (Ryding, 2005). This requires learners to internalize both the roots and the patterns, which can be overwhelming, especially for beginners. For many learners, rote memorization can be tedious and may not promote long-term retention if words are not used in context. Also, it may not help learners understand the cultural or contextual nuances of words. The following figure illustrates how the root system works in Arabic.

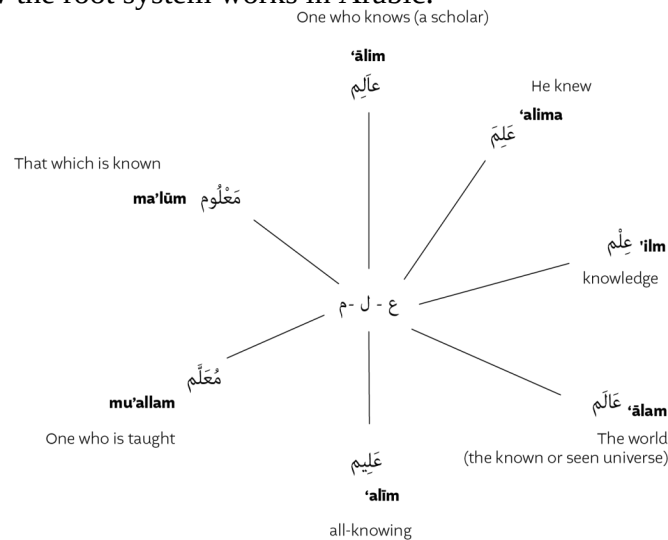


Figure 3 - Various patterns stemming from one root (Arabic for Beginners. 2019).

Some students did not know the meaning of the newly introduced words because they were unable to identify the base root of the words introduced. Such words introduced in the text include:

"وخيمة" (wakheema, "sever")

"الإبداعية" (al iba3iya, "the creative")

"الفساد" (al fasaad, "corruption")

#### 8.1.2 Phonetic and Orthographic Challenges

Arabic has a rich phonetic inventory, including sounds that are unfamiliar to speakers of Indo-European languages, such as the pharyngeal consonants "ع" (ʿayn) and "ح" (ḥa) (Watson 2002). These sounds can be difficult to pronounce and distinguish, particularly for learners whose native languages lack similar phonemes. Additionally, the Arabic script is cursive and includes letters that change shape depending on their position in a word, adding another layer of complexity to reading and writing.

#### Culturally Embedded Vocabulary

Many Arabic words have cultural, religious, or historical connotations that may not be immediately apparent to non-native speakers. For example, the word "جهاد" (jihad) is often misunderstood in Western contexts but carries a complex meaning in Arabic, encompassing both personal struggle and collective effort (Alosh 2005). Understanding these nuances requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural familiarity, which can be a significant barrier for learners. Notes from students also revealed that cognitive factors, such as memory and prior language knowledge, are crucial for vocabulary acquisition. Many students struggled to remember the patterns associated with roots that carry the meaning of many new unfamiliar words. Additionally, cultural factors, such as the participant's familiarity with Arab

culture, were found to influence their ability to understand and remember new vocabulary. One participant stated, "Understanding the cultural context of a word makes it easier to remember. It gives the word meaning beyond just its definition." The role of cognitive and cultural factors in vocabulary acquisition is well-documented in the literature (Ellis 1994; Kramsch 1993). This study highlights the importance of cultural familiarity in understanding and remembering new vocabulary, particularly in a language as culturally rich as Arabic.

The significance of cultural context in the Arabic language cannot be overstated for learners from abroad. Many words in Arabic are imbued with meanings that are deeply rooted in the cultural and religious traditions of the Arab world, which may elude comprehension for individuals unfamiliar with these backgrounds.

Consequently, it is essential for non-native speakers to engage with the cultural nuances associated with the Arabic language. A thorough understanding of these elements not only enhances language acquisition but also fosters a deeper appreciation of the diverse cultural heritage that shapes the Arabic lexicon.

Idiomatic expressions may fall under this category where exposure to the native culture is a crucial element in knowing the meaning of these idiomatic expressions in addition to context of course. Such expressions found in the text that were challenging to students include:

"**الانفجار السكاني**" (al infijar assukanni, "population explosion")

"**اختناقات مرورية**" (ikhtinaqat mururriya, "traffic jams")

"**جيش عرمرم**" (jaysh 3ramram, "a massive army")

## Strategies for Vocabulary Learning

The strategies employed by participants in this study are consistent with those identified in the literature (Oxford 1990; Cohen 1998). Rote memorization and learning common roots and patterns, contextual learning, and guessing based on context are common strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Almost all participants noted that they used the two most common strategies for finding out the meanings of new words introduced in texts for the first time that include root patterns memorization and context sentential clues. One participant explained, "I find many Arabic words to be difficult to understand but having them in context helps me guess their meaning especially when coupled with my prior knowledge of most of the Arabic words' patterns.

## Rote Memorization

Rote memorization involves repeatedly reviewing and rehearsing words until they are committed to memory. This traditional method is widely used in Arabic vocabulary learning due to the language's root-based morphology and lack of cognates with Indo-European languages. Arabic's root-based system is both a challenge and an opportunity for learners. While the system is complex, it is also highly logical and systematic. Once learners understand a root, they can often predict the meanings of related words, even if they have never encountered them before through applying the proper pattern to the root. Memorizing roots aligns with the brain's natural tendency to categorize and organize information. By grouping words that share the same root, learners create mental connections that enhance retention and recall (Nation 2001). For example, the root "**درس**" (d-r-s) relates to studying, and from this root, learners can derive words like "**درس**" (dars, "lesson"), "**مدروس**" (madroos, "something studied"), and "**دارس**" (daris, "someone who studies"), and "**مدرسة**" (madrasa, "school"). This systematic approach makes root memorization an efficient way to build vocabulary.



The root system demonstrates how a single set of consonants can generate multiple words with related meanings, making root memorization a powerful tool for vocabulary acquisition. The root "صنع" (S-n-3) relates to manufacturing. Memorizing this root allows learners to understand and use words such as:

"صانع" (Sani'3 "manufacturer")

"مصنع" (maSna3, "factory")

"مصنوع" (maSnoo3, "manufactured")

"يصنع" (yaSna'3 "he manufactures")

Another example is the root "سفر" (s-f-r) is associated with travel and movement. By learning this root, learners can easily recognize and use words like:

"سفر" (safar, "travel")

"مسافر" (musafir, "traveler")

"سفرة" (sufra, "table" or "meal")

"سفیر" (safir, "ambassador")

"يسافر" (yusafir, "he travels")

From the text given to students, many were able to know the meaning of the newly introduced words through this method of root-pattern relationship. Such words include:

"المعاصر" (almu3aSer, "current"). Students were able first to identify the root of the word ر ص ع and then apply the appropriate pattern to know the target word is a noun not a verb or an adjective. Through analogy with other similar words such as "عصر" (3aSr) which means "era or age", students were able to guess the meaning of the word. 85% of students gave the correct meaning of the word. The confusion came from the similarity of the root with another meaning namely to squeeze. Students were able to know the approximate root meaning through context.

Another example is the word "إبداعية" (ibda3iyya) which means "creative". Most of the students (90%) were able to identify the root of the word and pattern but 60% of them were able to give the correct meaning of the word. Again, a major source of help is context.

"مواجهة" (muwajaha, "confrontation") is another example of how root and pattern memorization is helpful in acquiring new vocabulary. The word means "confrontation" and 95% of students were able to know the meaning of the word as they were able to identify the root and through analogy with a word they know before which is "وجه" (wajh) which means "face", they were able to know the required meaning of the word.

Another word is "المؤشر" (almu'ashir) meaning "the indicator". 80% of students were able to give the correct meaning of the word because it was easy for them to identify the root, the pattern, and thus the meaning of the root. The root is ا ش ر (a sh r). By applying the pattern indicating that the word in question is a noun, they were able to give the correct meaning with the help and confirmation from context. Some students confused the word and the root with "شر" (sharr) which means evil, but the context eliminated this meaning leaving these students with no feasible answer.

The word "فساد" (fasaad) is another example of how knowing the root and patterns of a word can be an effective strategy in knowing the meaning of new vocabulary. The root ف س د (f s d) means "was corrupted". When applying the pattern, the students are able to identify the word as a noun confirmed by the Arabic definite article which preceded the word. 85% of students were able to provide the correct meaning of the words although some of them

were confused with the similarity of the word with the English word façade which means false appearance as the two words almost have the same pronunciation.

Since Arabic words often share common roots, memorizing these roots and their associated patterns can help learners recognize and deduce the meanings of related words. Repetition reinforces memory, making it easier to recall words during speaking, reading, or writing tasks. The previous examples highlight how root memorization can help learners navigate both concrete and abstract concepts in Arabic.

## Contextual learning

Along with root and pattern memorization, comes contextual clues learning. In the sample examined, context proved to be a crucial factor in identifying the meaning of new vocabulary. For some students, contextual clues aided their meaning-identifying process while with others, context was the only clue in their meaning exploration process especially when coupled with prior cultural knowledge due to direct or indirect exposure to the target Arabic culture. Idiomatic expressions can fall under this category of learning based on context, culture and guessing.

## The use of contextual, cultural clues and guessing

### *Idiomatic expressions*

Idiomatic expressions represent a challenge to international students learning new Arabic vocabulary. The main challenge is that meaning often cannot be derived from the meaning of the elements comprising that idiomatic expression. They can be classified into categories such as: grammatical classifications and stylistic and metaphorical relationships. The following discussion highlights how students dealt with such new expressions and the strategies they employed:

### *Grammatical Classifications*

#### **الإضافة** Idafa (Construct Phrase)

This consists of a noun followed by a genitive noun (**مضاف ومضاف إليه**), such as:

- **اللعب بالنار** (al la3ib binnar, “playing with fire”). 95% of students were able to know the figurative meaning of this idiomatic expression since it can be found in most of their cultural backgrounds. Similarity with other foreign idiomatic expressions helped the students in acquiring this Arabic metaphorical expression.

- **نبض الشارع** (nabD ashshari3, “the pulse of the street”). In this idiomatic expression 100% of students knew the meaning of the second part "**الشارع**" (the street) and 10% only knew the meaning of the first part "**نبض**" meaning (pulse). Context though coupled with guessing which can be a successful strategy in knowing new meanings of words helped most of the students identify the meaning of this expression (65%) which is people's opinions and feelings.

- **عنق الزجاج** (3unuq azzujaja, “the nick of the bottle”). 45% of students were able to figure out the meaning of this new expression. The main strategies they used are cultural knowledge and guessing based on that prior knowledge. The expression means the upper part of the bottle, used as a metaphor for a crisis and being in a tight spot.

#### **المركب الوصفي** Descriptive Phrase:

This consists of a described noun and its descriptor (**موصوف وصفة**), such as:

- **أبيض ناصع** (abyaD naSi3, “bright white”)
- **جيش عرمرم** (jaysh 3ramram, “a massive army”)
- **روح رياضية** (ro7 riyadDiyah, “sportsmanship spirit”)

In descriptive phrase phase, students faced less difficulty although one of two parts comprising the phrase were unknown to students. This is due to the nature of this descriptive phrase where one easy word accompanies another difficult word. Thus, the meaning of a word such as "عمرم" as in the phrase "جيش عمرم" above which is difficult even to native speakers of the language, was aided by the word "جيش" which is known to many non-native speakers at that level of language. 65% of students answered the meaning of the word as "massive". 30% answered "strong", and 5% answered irrelevant meanings. In the case of "أبيض ناصع", 95% of students answered the meaning of the phrase correctly although this is the first time they encounter the word "ناصع" because the word "أبيض" (white) in almost all the time is associated with something bright or shiny.

### *Stylistic and Metaphorical Relationships*

Like many idiomatic expressions, these involve expressions that convey meanings beyond their literal sense, often through vivid imagery or symbolic language. Examples include:

- **اختناقات مرورية** (ikhtinaqat mururriya, "traffic congestion"): The meaning of this idiomatic expression cannot be deduced from the meaning of its two components or its literal meaning simply because it does not make sense as traffic does not suffocate. Through using the root system approach (خ ن ق - مّر), context clues such as accompanying words in the text such as (مدن - سكان), and finally guessing, 75% of students gave the correct meaning of the phrase.

- **الانفجار السكاني** (al infijar assukkani, "population enormous increase"): This metaphor vividly illustrates the rapid and overwhelming growth of a population, emphasizing its dramatic and uncontrollable nature. The literal meaning is not accounted for as population cannot explode literally. 70% of students understood this fact. Identifying the expression as idiomatic is the first step towards trying to figure out the meaning of the phrase. Again, through using the root system (although 85% of students did not know the root of the word "انفجار", and 90% knew the root of the word "السكاني"), context clues, and common sense, 85% provided accurate answers, 15% provided nearly correct answers or incorrect ones.

It becomes clear from the examples cited above that non-native learners of Arabic can to a high extent acquire new vocabulary if introduced in text. Contextual clues proved to be a valuable instrument used by learners of Arabic to overcome the barriers of vocabulary acquisition. The root system although might be complicated to many non-native learners of Arabic, it is also an invaluable technique that should be nurtured and refined. Instructors of Arabic should be creative in delivering the basics of this morphological system to their students because once correctly taught, it can serve as an indispensable tool in knowing and acquiring new Arabic vocabulary.

It is also imperative to stress the importance of mother tongue exposure mainly by living in an Arabic speaking country or a community where Arabic is spoken all the time. Arabic vocabulary is like a chain where every word is a link connecting a following link. In his interpretation of the functional theory in language acquisition, Al-Osaily (2002) views this approach as multifaceted and is concerned with the cognitive representation of language in the mind, and the utilization of this knowledge in actual language use and communication. He believes that this theory, and all its offshoots, is based on the premise that second language vocabulary acquisition is the result of interactive contact with the native language elements and real communicative situations requiring various tasks, such as analyzing, synthesizing, embedding, linking, memorizing and so on, to overcome the difficulties the learner encounters while using the language.

## **Conclusion**

This research paper provides a thorough exploration of the perceptions of international students regarding new Arabic vocabulary, offering valuable insights for educators and learners alike. The mixed-methods approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strategies, and cognitive and cultural factors involved in vocabulary acquisition. The findings and recommendations presented in this paper can contribute to the development of more effective teaching methodologies and learning strategies for Arabic as a foreign language.

This study also provides a comprehensive analysis of the perceptions of international students regarding new Arabic vocabulary. The findings reveal that students face significant challenges in vocabulary acquisition, particularly due to learning such vocabulary out of context, the complexity of the Arabic root system which proved to be a barrier and a facilitator at the same time, the lack of cognates, and the cultural loaded context embedded in the language. However, students employ a variety of strategies to overcome these challenges, including rote memorization and pattern application, contextual clues, and logical guessing. Cognitive and cultural factors also play a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition, influencing students' ability to understand and remember new words to associate them with other similar newly introduced words.

## **Implications for Educators**

The findings of this study have important implications for educators teaching Arabic to international students. Educators should consider incorporating more explicit instruction on Arabic morphology and cultural context into their curricula. Additionally, systemizing and enhancing guessing strategies, and developing ways to enhance making use of cultural and contextual clues can be effective methods students can use frequently to know the meaning of newly introduced vocabulary. Such strategies should be encouraged to support vocabulary acquisition.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should explore conducting longitudinal studies would be instrumental in understanding the progression of vocabulary development over time. These studies could shed light on the dynamic nature of vocabulary acquisition and how learners' attitudes towards new words shift as they gain greater proficiency in Arabic.

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## **Appendix 1.**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

1. How long have you been studying Arabic?
2. What is your native language?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how challenging do you find learning new Arabic vocabulary?
4. What are the main challenges you face when learning new Arabic vocabulary? (Select all that apply)
  - Complexity of Arabic morphology
  - Difficulty understanding cultural connotations (Culture related issues)
  - Other (please specify)
5. What strategies do you use to learn new Arabic vocabulary? (Select all that apply)
  - Rote memorization
  - Contextual learning
  - Cultural exposure
  - Guessing
  - Other (please specify)
6. How important do you think cultural familiarity is in understanding new Arabic vocabulary?
7. How do you think your cognitive abilities (e.g., memory, attention) affect your vocabulary acquisition?
8. Can you give an example of a word that was particularly difficult for you to learn and why?

## Appendix 2.

Table 1: Arabic phonological symbols

Letter	Phonetic symbols	Letter	Phonetic Symbols
ا	a	ض	D
ب	b	ط	t̤
ت	t	ظ	ð̤
ث	th	ع	ʕ
ج	dj	غ	g̣
ح	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	ʔ
ذ	d̤	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	S	ي	y



### Appendix 3.

#### Arabic text

في عالمنا **المعاصر**، أصبحت الحياة مليئة بالتحديات التي تتطلب منا التعامل بحكمة و**روح رياضية**، فلا يمكننا **اللعب بالنار** في قراراتنا اليومية دون أن نعاني من **عواقب وخيمة**. في المدن الكبرى، نلاحظ **اختناقات مرورية** خانقة تعكس **الانفجار السكاني** الذي يشهده العالم، مما يجعل الخروج من **عنق الزجاجة** مهمة شبه مستحيلة أحيانًا. ومع ذلك، يجب أن نعطي **الضوء الأخضر** للحلول **الإبداعية** التي تهدف إلى تخفيف هذه **الضغوط**. وفي خضم هذه التحديات، يرفع البعض **الراية البيضاء مستسلمين** للواقع، بينما يصر آخرون على **مواجهة** الصعاب **بصلابة جيش عرمرم**. وفي النهاية، يبقى **نبض الشارع** هو **المؤشر** الحقيقي لصحة المجتمع، حيث يتطلع الجميع إلى **غصن الزيتون** كرمز للسلام والتعاون. ومن المهم أن نحرص على أن تكون **أيدينا نظيفة** في كل ما نقوم به، وأن نسعى دائمًا لتحقيق **العدالة والنزاهة**، حتى تتمكن من بناء مستقبل **أبيض ناصع خالٍ من الفساد والظلم**.