

# Challenges Faced by Non-Native Arabic Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Their Relationship With Digital Technology Skills and Oral Expression Skills

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the challenges experienced by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 pandemic and explores the relationship between these challenges and learners' digital technology proficiency and oral expression skills. Employing a descriptive research approach, the study utilized a set of tools, including questionnaires administered to both faculty members and students, as well as observation and test cards. The findings revealed that both faculty members and students perceived significant challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the pandemic, with an overall evaluation of "average" difficulty. Additionally, the results indicated no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level in students' perceptions of these challenges based on variables such as academic level, nationality, or GPA. Regarding digital technology skills, no statistically significant correlation was found between the challenges faced by learners and their self-reported digital skills. However, a statistically significant correlation was observed between the challenges and learners' performance in digital technology tests. Furthermore, the study found a statistically significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level between the challenges encountered by learners and their oral expression skills. These findings underscore the multifaceted challenges non-native Arabic learners faced during the pandemic and highlight the critical intersections between technological proficiency and language expression abilities.

**Index Terms**—learning challenges, non-native Arabic learners, digital technology skills, oral expression skills

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning plays a pivotal role in facilitating knowledge acquisition and specialization. Beyond being a tool for communication, language serves as a gateway to various disciplines and a means to access diverse cultural and intellectual heritage. Among the world's languages, Arabic holds a unique position as the primary medium for understanding Islamic sciences, including the Holy Quran. Renowned for its rich vocabulary, complex structures, and adaptability, Arabic is considered one of the most enduring languages. Despite historical challenges, Arabic has consistently evolved, remaining influential in global discourse (Al-Hawamdeh & Al-Saadi, 2015; Almelhes, 2024).

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of non-native speakers learning Arabic as a second language. This trend is driven by motivations such as exposure to Arab culture, its rich heritage, and the practical need for communication in diverse professional and political contexts. This increasing global interest has necessitated the development of effective teaching strategies and the integration of technology into language instruction to meet the needs of non-native learners. However, learners of Arabic face various challenges, including mastering its diversified scripts, syntactic complexities, and lexical sophistication (Almelhes, 2024).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to education systems worldwide, forcing institutions to transition to distance learning to ensure continuity. In Saudi Arabia, universities offering Arabic programs for non-native speakers embraced this shift by integrating digital technologies into their curricula. This transition underscored the importance of equipping learners with digital technology skills to navigate online learning environments effectively. However, the success of this integration hinges on the proper use and application of these technologies, which requires preparation and training for both educators and learners (Abdulmonem, 2021; Al-Assaf, 2021).

Digital technologies, while enhancing the educational process, are not a replacement for the teacher. Instead, they act as a tool to facilitate learning, assess performance, and provide feedback. For non-native Arabic learners, the use of digital resources can significantly impact the development of linguistic skills, particularly oral expression—a critical component of language acquisition. Oral expression allows learners to communicate effectively, articulate their thoughts, and build confidence through participation in conversations and discussions. It is a fundamental goal of Arabic language instruction, emphasizing correct pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and the ability to convey meaning with clarity and fluency (Omran, 2022).

Despite its importance, research indicates that non-native Arabic learners face numerous challenges in acquiring oral expression skills, often due to linguistic, cultural, and technological barriers. For instance, learners may struggle with the

phonetic and grammatical features of Arabic, which differ significantly from their native languages. Additionally, limited exposure to digital tools and insufficient preparation for online learning exacerbate these challenges. Neglecting to address such challenges early can result in their persistence, ultimately hindering learners' success in acquiring Arabic (Almelhes, 2024b).

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these challenges, creating an urgent need to investigate the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners in this context. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the relationship between these challenges and learners' digital technology skills and oral expression abilities. While existing research has examined general language learning challenges, few studies have specifically focused on the unique challenges posed by the pandemic or their implications for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers (Moghaz, 2020).

By examining these issues, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving Arabic language instruction for non-native learners, particularly in a digital learning context. It seeks to provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers to address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of Arabic language programs.

#### A. Statement of the Problem

The researcher's extensive experience in teaching non-native speakers of Arabic and regular interaction with them has revealed a noticeable lack of engagement with digital technologies in both their educational and social lives. A pilot study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic involved interviews with ten non-native Arabic learners from Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University. The results highlighted several challenges, including insufficient prior training in digital technology skills. This finding underscores the pressing need to identify the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and to propose practical solutions to address them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed education globally, forcing a shift from traditional group instruction to individualized, distance education. This sudden transition has particularly impacted Arabic language instruction for non-native speakers, exposing gaps in learners' digital preparedness and linguistic skill development. It has also placed new demands on learners to acquire digital technology skills alongside their linguistic training.

Several studies have emphasized the challenges faced by language learners and the importance of understanding their relationship with key variables. For example, Kitishat (2020), Mahyob (2020), Mahib (2020), and Choi (2021) have all highlighted the significance of identifying and addressing learning challenges. These studies collectively stress the need to explore how language instruction adapts to technological and contextual shifts, such as those imposed by the pandemic.

Building on this body of research, this study aims to investigate the specific challenges encountered by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 crisis. It also examines the relationship between these challenges and learners' digital technology skills and oral expression abilities. By addressing these challenges, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights for improving Arabic language instruction in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

#### B. Significance of the Study

This research is expected to provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the pandemic and their relationship with digital technology skills and oral expression abilities. The findings aim to:

- Highlight specific challenges encountered by learners during the transition to digital learning.
- Examine the role of digital technology in supporting or hindering language acquisition.
- Investigate the relationship between oral expression skills and the challenges faced by learners.
- Inform the development of targeted interventions and curriculum enhancements to support non-native learners.
- Serve as a foundation for future research exploring related themes, such as the relationship between learning challenges and variables like motivation, academic achievement, or emotional intelligence.

#### C. Definition of Key Terms

- *Challenges*: It is a state of real or artificial concern and confusion that requires deep thinking to solve (Good, 1973, p. 435). It is operationally defined as measured by the percentage obtained by the questionnaire items, and the item that obtains 50% or more is considered a difficulty.
- *Learning Challenges and Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers*: The researcher defines it procedurally as the obstacles that students who learn Arabic and speak other languages suffer from while studying Arabic during the COVID-19 pandemic at the Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers at King Abdulaziz University.
- *Digital Technology Skills*: a set of basic skills that include the use and production of digital media, information processing and retrieval, and participation in social networks to create and exchange knowledge (Dobre, 2015). It is procedurally defined as the ability of non-native Arabic language learners at the Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers at the diploma level at King Abdulaziz University to learn a set of basic skills that include the use and production of digital media, information processing and retrieval; to find and manage the editing of digital information in a way that helps them learn the Arabic language and its skills and saves them effort and time.
- *Oral Expression*: The student's ability to produce ideas and meanings and then translate them into a grammatically and morphologically correct sound image, with the ability to color the performance in a way that

is consistent with the meaning, using accompanying physical movements and taking into account the places of connection and separation during the conversation (Al-Khamasiya, 2012, p. 222). It is defined procedurally as the ability of the student who is a non-native Arabic language learner to use the spoken language to convey his ideas, feelings and opinions, using easy, clear words that express the meaning and influence the listener, with the ability to color the performance through epic movements.

## II. PREVIOUS STUDIES

### A. *Previous Studies in the Field of Language Learning Challenges*

Wargadinata et al. (2020) explored the media tools employed in teaching Arabic at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic necessitated a shift from traditional classroom instruction to online education. Results revealed that the majority of students relied on the WhatsApp application for communication and engaged in self-directed learning using available educational platforms. Kitishat et al. (2020) investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching English as a second language (ESL). The study highlighted challenges in transitioning to online teaching, particularly challenges in e-learning implementation. Notably, electronic assessments emerged as a significant challenge, with multiple-choice questions being prone to academic dishonesty.

Similarly, Mahyoob (2020) examined the obstacles ESL learners faced during the pandemic, focusing on technical and accessibility challenges. The study revealed that approximately 30% of students were unable to attend online classes due to challenges with the Blackboard platform, unreliable internet connections, and issues accessing virtual classes or downloading educational materials. Additionally, students reported challenges with completing electronic assessments on mobile devices.

In a study conducted by Bahruddin and Febriani (2020), students' perceptions of online Arabic learning at an Islamic college in Malang were examined. Findings indicated that online Arabic instruction was perceived as ineffective due to issues such as poor internet connectivity, lack of internal motivation, inadequate teacher guidance, and ineffective distribution of learning materials.

The study by Al-Nofaie (2020) analyzed Taif University students' perceptions of using the Blackboard platform for online learning during the pandemic. The research aimed to identify the advantages and disadvantages of virtual education. Results suggested that students often found online learning unappealing, highlighting the need for improvements in engagement strategies and educational delivery methods. Additionally, Mahib (2020) explored the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) online in Saudi Arabia, focusing on teachers' satisfaction levels. A pilot study conducted with educators from Qassim University, King Khalid University, and Najran University revealed that effective online EFL instruction could yield positive outcomes if robust training and support programs were provided for teachers and learners, along with updated electronic teaching platforms.

In a comparative study, Juszczak and Suwan (2020) analyzed distance learning curricula at Silesian University of Technology in Poland and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea. Results indicated a preference among both students and teachers for traditional face-to-face instruction due to the enhanced interaction it facilitates. This mode allows for immediate clarification of complex content, active engagement in social learning, and improved opportunities for questions and discussions.

Choi and Chung (2021) investigated the challenges and adaptations in language teaching during the pandemic. Findings underscored the importance of equipping language teachers with adequate training and technical expertise to utilize digital platforms effectively. This approach was deemed essential for fostering student engagement and facilitating real-time online collaborative interactions.

The study by Ritonga et al. (2021) assessed students' and teachers' perceptions of the quality of Arabic language teaching during the pandemic. Results highlighted low levels of satisfaction with e-learning, both in terms of the learning process and educational outcomes, indicating the need for substantial improvements in digital teaching strategies. Al-Sanani (2022) focused on the challenges of learning Arabic remotely as a second language. The study identified major obstacles related to educational content and instructional methods, emphasizing the importance of adapting teaching strategies to better meet learners' needs in virtual environments.

Finally, the study by Al-Shalot (2024) explored the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners. The findings highlighted the importance of overcoming barriers to learning classical Arabic to enable students to achieve fluency and proficiency in speaking.

### B. *Previous Studies in the Field of Digital Technology Skills*

The study by Al-Badou (2021) examined the role of digital skills in advancing researchers' scientific pursuits. Specifically, it explored how digital tools could guide researchers in selecting research problems aligned with 21st-century demands, enhance critical and creative thinking processes, and foster rational decision-making. The study concluded that education and technology are crucial in shaping the capabilities and characteristics needed for future researchers, emphasizing the importance of developing distinctive research-oriented skills.

In another study, Abdel-Moneim (2021) investigated the effectiveness of a digital environment based on adaptive learning in enhancing deep understanding skills among female students at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza. The results

demonstrated that adaptive digital learning environments significantly improved the students' ability to engage deeply with educational content, showcasing the potential of technology-driven methodologies in higher education.

Naziha and Qasmiya (2021) explored the integration of smart digital education in rehabilitation programs for individuals with special needs. Focusing on a center for the blind in Biskra, their findings revealed that modern digital technologies were largely underutilized in the teaching and rehabilitation processes. Instead, traditional methods dominated, limiting the effectiveness of educational programs for visually impaired learners.

### C. Previous Studies in the Field of Oral Expression Skills

The study by Al-Samadi (2018) assessed the impact of a computerized program on developing oral expressive language skills among students with learning challenges. Results revealed statistically significant improvements in oral expression within the experimental group, indicating that technology-enhanced interventions can effectively support language development for learners with special needs.

Sabry and Bahri (2019) examined the influence of digital audiobooks on developing oral expression skills in English among blind secondary school students. Their findings highlighted a substantial improvement in the speaking skills of students who used digital audiobooks compared to those taught with traditional textbook methods, underscoring the effectiveness of this innovative approach.

Khalawi (2019) focused on how Arabic language curricula address the distinction between oral and written expression. The study revealed a significant gap: secondary-level Arabic curricula failed to account for the unique characteristics of oral expression, often treating it merely as a tool to support written expression. This lack of differentiation in objectives, teaching methods, and assessment criteria limited the independent development of oral expressive skills.

### D. Comment on Previous Studies

The reviewed studies collectively underscore the challenges and opportunities in teaching language skills, particularly in the context of digital education and oral expression. These studies have illuminated the extent to which non-native Arabic learners and other language students encounter challenges during online education, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current study aligns with previous research in its focus on identifying the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners. However, it distinguishes itself through its emphasis on correlating these challenges with digital technology skills and oral expression abilities, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay between these variables. By targeting non-native Arabic learners at King Abdulaziz University, this research adds specificity to the field, addressing a population underrepresented in earlier studies. This study also diverges in its methodological approach, employing a diverse set of tools, including questionnaires for students and faculty, observation cards for digital and oral skills, and a digital technology skills test. These methods complement the primarily questionnaire-based approaches of earlier research, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges.

Building on the findings of prior studies, this research refines and applies their methodologies to its specific context. It adopts established frameworks for designing effective research tools and statistical analyses while extending the field through its focus on the unique circumstances of non-native Arabic learners during a global crisis. By doing so, this study serves as a continuation and expansion of prior work, contributing both theoretical and practical insights to the discipline.

## III. METHOD

### A. Research Design

This study adopted the descriptive-analytical method, which involves examining phenomena as they exist in reality and providing an accurate depiction of their characteristics. This approach encompasses both qualitative and quantitative dimensions: qualitatively, by describing and clarifying the characteristics of the phenomena, and quantitatively, by numerically analyzing their size or degree of association with other phenomena (Obeidat et al., 2004, pp. 187–188). The descriptive-analytical method was deemed the most appropriate for this study, as it allows for a comprehensive diagnosis of the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it facilitates an exploration of the relationships between these challenges and the learners' digital technology skills and oral expression abilities.

#### (a). Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What challenges did non-native Arabic learners face during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) Are there differences in the challenges faced by learners based on variables such as educational level, nationality, and cumulative GPA?
- 3) Is there a statistically significant relationship between the challenges faced by learners and their digital technology skills?
- 4) Is there a statistically significant relationship between the challenges faced by learners and their oral expression skills?

#### (b). Scope and Delimitations of the Study

- 5) This study focuses on non-native Arabic learners enrolled in the Diploma Program for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers at King Abdulaziz University. It examines the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those related to classroom activities, assessment methods, and language skills, with an emphasis on digital technology and oral expression. Research tools were applied during a single semester to capture learners' experiences and perceptions.

### B. Participants

The research community refers to the entire group to which the results of a study can be generalized, encompassing individuals, books, school buildings, or other relevant entities (Al-Assaf, 2010, p. 19). For the purposes of this study, the research community comprised two groups: students enrolled in the diploma program at the Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers at King Abdulaziz University, and faculty members from various institutions involved in teaching Arabic as a second language.

The student population included all third- and fourth-level students in the diploma program at the Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers at King Abdulaziz University, totaling 87 students. Of these, 44 students were enrolled in the third level, and 43 in the fourth level, according to official statistics. A sample of 52 students from this population was selected for the study, representing both levels.

The faculty population consisted of instructors from the Arabic Language Teaching Institutes at King Abdulaziz University, King Saud University, Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, Umm Al-Qura University, and the Islamic University. A total of 37 faculty members from these institutions were selected to participate in the study.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments, a simple random pilot sample was selected. This pilot group included 20 students from the diploma program and 20 faculty members. These participants were utilized to refine the questionnaire, test, and observation cards. However, the pilot sample was excluded from the final study sample to avoid influencing the research results.

### C. Research Instruments

This section outlines the procedures followed in preparing and refining the research instruments used in this study. Each instrument underwent rigorous development and validation processes to ensure reliability and accuracy. As a preliminary step in designing the main study instruments, the following lists were developed and refined to serve as foundational tools for measuring the study's key variables: challenges faced by non-native Arabic language learners, digital technology skills, and oral expression skills:

- *A List of Challenges Faced by Non-Native Arabic Language Learners:* A list was created to diagnose the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the list included five main categories comprising 50 sub-challenges. After review by a panel of nine experts, modifications were made, such as rephrasing items, merging related challenges, and removing redundant ones. The finalized list retained its structure of five main categories and 50 sub-challenges.
- *Digital Technology Skills List:* This list aimed to measure Arabic learners' digital technology performance and its relationship with the identified challenges. Initially containing five main skills and 24 sub-skills, it was reviewed and refined based on expert feedback, resulting in five main skills and 25 sub-skills.
- *List of Oral Expression Skills:* Designed to assess learners' oral expression abilities, this list originally comprised four main areas and 19 sub-skills. After expert review, adjustments were made, retaining the same structure in the final version.

Based on these lists the following research tools were designed:

(a). *Faculty Questionnaire:* This instrument aimed to identify the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and their relationship with digital technology and oral expression skills. Initially comprising six main challenges and 80 sub-challenges, the questionnaire was refined through expert review and pilot testing. A five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was used to facilitate statistical analysis. Internal consistency was validated using Pearson's correlation coefficient, while reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.968, indicating high reliability.

(b). *Students' Questionnaire:* Similarly, this questionnaire was designed to assess the challenges faced by learners, with six main challenges and 81 sub-challenges. Expert reviews and pilot testing refined the questionnaire, and internal consistency and reliability were verified. A five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was used. The Cronbach's Alpha score for this tool was 0.986, reflecting its strong reliability.

#### (c). Observation Checklists

- *Digital Technology Skills Checklist:* This tool evaluated learners' digital skills performance, starting with five main skills and 43 sub-skills. Expert review led to refinements without altering the structure. A four-point Likert scale (High to None) was used for assessment. Internal consistency was confirmed through Pearson's correlation coefficients, and reliability was verified using split-half (0.935) and Cronbach's Alpha (0.982) methods, ensuring the checklist's robustness.
- *Oral Expression Skills Checklist:*
- Designed to assess learners' oral expression abilities, this checklist contained four main skills and 19 sub-skills. Experts provided feedback leading to minor revisions. A five-point Likert scale (Very High to None) was used.

Internal consistency and reliability were confirmed through split-half (0.960) and Cronbach's Alpha (0.985) methods, demonstrating the checklist's reliability for research purposes.

(d). *Digital Technology Skills Test for Arabic Language Learners for Non-Native Speakers*: This test measured the digital technology proficiency of non-native Arabic learners, initially comprising 41 objective questions. Expert reviews refined the test, resulting in the removal of one question, leaving 40 items in the final version. Scoring was binary (1 for correct answers, 0 for incorrect), with a total score range of 0–40. The test underwent validation for ease, difficulty, and discrimination coefficients, all of which fell within acceptable ranges. Reliability was confirmed through split-half (0.91) and Cronbach's Alpha (0.93) methods, ensuring the test's robustness. The test required 60 minutes for administration, including 5 minutes for instructions and preparation.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the application of the research tools and statistical analysis of the collected data. The results are structured to address each research question and are followed by interpretations and discussions contextualized within the framework of previous studies and relevant literature.

##### A. *Research Question 1: What Challenges Did Non-Native Arabic Learners Face During the COVID-19 Pandemic?*

To address this question, the means and standard deviations were calculated for the responses of faculty members and non-native Arabic learners regarding the challenges encountered during the pandemic. The challenges were categorized into key domains, and the results were arranged in descending order based on the weighted means and standard deviations, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
CHALLENGES FACED BY NON-NATIVE ARABIC LEARNERS DURING COVID-19: FACULTY PERSPECTIVES (N = 37)

| No.                 | Challenge   | Mean        | Standard Deviation | Relative Importance | Difficulty Level | Rank |
|---------------------|---|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|------|
| 1                   | Challenges related to direct attendance                                 | 2.82        | 0.69               | 56.4%               | Average          | 6    |
| 2                   | Challenges related to teaching methods                                  | 2.96        | 0.74               | 59.2%               | Average          | 4    |
| 3                   | Challenges related to classroom and extracurricular language activities | 3.27        | 0.81               | 65.3%               | Average          | 1    |
| 4                   | Challenges related to content   | 3.08        | 0.79               | 61.6%               | Average          | 3    |
| 5                   | Challenges related to assessment  | 2.93        | 0.77               | 58.5%               | Average          | 5    |
| 6                   | Challenges related to language skills                                   | 3.12        | 0.70               | 62.4%               | Average          | 2    |
| <b>Overall Mean</b> |   | <b>3.02</b> | <b>0.59</b>        | <b>60.5%</b>        | Average          |      |

The results in Table 1 indicate that the overall mean score for faculty members' perceptions of the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 pandemic was 3.02 out of 5, with a relative importance of 60.5%. This suggests that faculty members perceived the challenges faced by these learners during the pandemic to be of a moderate degree. Among the identified challenges, those related to classroom and extracurricular language activities ranked the highest, with a mean score of 3.27, reflecting their significant impact on students' learning. These were followed by challenges related to language skills (mean = 3.12), content (mean = 3.08), teaching methods (mean = 2.96), assessment (mean = 2.93), and finally, direct attendance (mean = 2.82).

The researcher attributes the prominence of challenges related to classroom and extracurricular language activities to their critical role in fostering student engagement and comprehension. Classroom and extracurricular activities are essential for delivering lessons effectively, enhancing students' understanding of educational content, and supporting the development of their language skills.

These findings align with those of Bahrudin and Febriani (2020), who examined students' perceptions of online Arabic language education at a government Islamic college in Malang. Their study identified similar challenges, including poor internet connectivity, lack of teacher guidance, insufficient student motivation, and inadequate distribution of resources. They emphasized that language acquisition requires diverse mechanisms such as discussions, presentations, literature study, and writing, which were disrupted during the pandemic. To address these obstacles, the authors recommended revising curricula and improving the educational media used for online learning.

The results of this study underscore the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the pandemic, with particular attention to enhancing classroom and extracurricular activities in digital learning environments.

TABLE 2  
CHALLENGES FACED BY NON-NATIVE ARABIC LEARNERS DURING COVID-19: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE (N = 52)

| No.                 | Challenge   | Mean        | Standard Deviation | Relative Importance | Difficulty Level | Rank    |
|---------------------|---|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------|
| 1                   | Challenges related to direct attendance                                 | 3.16        | 0.79               | 63.2%               | Average          | 6       |
| 2                   | Challenges related to teaching methods                                  | 3.21        | 0.93               | 64.3%               | Average          | 5       |
| 3                   | Challenges related to classroom and extracurricular language activities | 3.30        | 0.85               | 66.0%               | Average          | 2       |
| 4                   | Challenges related to content   | 3.23        | 0.84               | 64.6%               | Average          | 4       |
| 5                   | Challenges related to assessment  | 3.26        | 0.80               | 65.2%               | Average          | 3       |
| 6                   | Challenges related to language skills                                   | 3.32        | 0.81               | 66.3%               | Average          | 1       |
| <b>Overall Mean</b> |   | <b>3.24</b> | <b>0.78</b>        | <b>64.9%</b>        | Average          | Average |

The data in Table 2 show that students' perceptions of the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 pandemic yielded mean scores ranging from 3.16 to 3.32, with an overall mean of 3.24 out of 5. The relative importance of these challenges was 64.9%, indicating that students viewed these challenges as moderate. Among the challenges, those related to language skills ranked highest (mean = 3.32), suggesting that students found this area most problematic. This was followed by challenges related to classroom and extracurricular language activities (mean = 3.30), assessment (mean = 3.26), content (mean = 3.23), teaching methods (mean = 3.21), and direct attendance (mean = 3.16).

The researcher attributes the prominence of challenges related to language skills to the inherent difficulties in mastering these skills during the pandemic. Factors such as asynchronous education and weak digital content likely exacerbated these difficulties, limiting opportunities for active practice and personalized feedback.

These findings align with those of Bahrudin and Febriani (2020), who highlighted the ineffectiveness of online Arabic education from students' perspectives. Their study identified challenges such as poor internet connectivity, lack of teacher guidance, and low internal motivation. Language acquisition, as they noted, requires interactive mechanisms like discussions, presentations, and writing, which were disrupted during the pandemic. They suggested addressing these challenges through curriculum revisions and improvements in the media used for online learning. Similarly, the findings are consistent with the study by Al-Sanani (2022), which emphasized the significant challenges learners faced with educational content and methods in distance learning environments. This study also aligns with Al-Shalot (2024), which explored the difficulties non-native Arabic learners faced in acquiring classical Arabic and suggested strategies for overcoming these barriers to improve speaking proficiency.

The convergence of these results underscores the critical need for enhanced instructional strategies, improved digital content, and robust support systems to address the challenges non-native Arabic learners face in mastering language skills during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *B. Research Question 2: Are There Differences in the Challenges Faced by Learners Based on Variables Such as Educational Level, Nationality, and Cumulative GPA?*

To answer this research question, the students' questionnaire scores were analyzed, and the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There are statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 between the mean scores on the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners according to the variable of academic level.
2. There are statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 between the mean scores on the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners according to the variable of nationality.
3. There are statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 between the mean scores on the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners according to the variable of cumulative GPA.

To evaluate these hypotheses, the Independent Samples T-Test was used to analyze differences based on the variable of educational level, while the One-Way ANOVA test was employed to examine differences based on nationality and cumulative GPA. The results are as follows:

##### *(a). Differences Based on Educational Level*

The Independent Samples T-Test revealed that the value of **T** was 0.113 for the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners according to educational level (third or fourth). This value was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Thus, there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of students regarding the challenges they faced based on their academic level.

##### *(b). Differences Based on Nationality*

The One-Way ANOVA test results showed that the value of **F** was 0.140 for the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners according to nationality. This value was also not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, no statistically significant differences were observed between the mean scores of students based on their nationality.

##### *(c). Differences Based on Cumulative GPA*

The One-Way ANOVA test results indicated that the value of **F** was 0.506 for the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners according to their cumulative GPA. Similar to the other variables, this value was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, demonstrating no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of students based on their cumulative GPA.

These findings suggest that students largely agreed on the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of their academic level, nationality, or cumulative GPA. This agreement may be attributed to the shared nature of the challenges encountered in learning Arabic as a non-native language during the pandemic. Factors such as the universal shift to online learning, limitations in digital content, and disruptions to traditional educational methods likely created similar experiences across these demographic variables.

These results align with the researcher's view that the consistent availability of challenges across the student population—such as difficulties with language skills, digital tools, and engagement in remote learning environments—led to a uniform perception of these obstacles

### *C. Research Question 3: Is There a Statistically Significant Relationship Between the Challenges Faced by Learners and Their Digital Technology Skills?*

To address this question, the relationship between the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and their digital technology skills was examined using two data sources: the scores from the digital technology skills observation checklist and test, and the students' questionnaire responses. The following hypothesis was tested:

There is a statistically significant correlation at the level of 0.05 between the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and their digital technology skills.

#### *(a). Findings for Digital Technology Skills (Observation)*

The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the relationship between the challenges faced by learners and their digital technology skills as observed through the checklist. The results showed a correlation coefficient of 0.254, which is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there is no significant correlation between the challenges faced by learners and their digital technology skills as measured through observation.

The researcher attributes the lack of correlation to the generally adequate mastery of digital technology skills among students, which enables them to interact effectively with e-learning platforms and applications. This conclusion is supported by the observation results, which indicate that most students demonstrated a sufficient ability to utilize digital tools for both synchronous and asynchronous learning.

#### *(b). Findings for Digital Technology Skills (Test)*

The Pearson correlation coefficient for the relationship between the challenges faced by learners and their digital technology skills as measured through the test was 0.514, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates a moderate positive correlation between the challenges faced by learners and their digital technology skills as assessed through the test.

The researcher believes that this correlation reflects the test's ability to accurately measure students' digital technology proficiency. The test results revealed students' true levels of competence, particularly in using applications and programs related to e-learning, which highlighted the connection between these skills and the challenges they experienced. The structured nature of the test likely provided a more precise assessment than observation alone, explaining the presence of a significant correlation.

### *D. Research Question 4: Is There a Statistically Significant Relationship Between the Challenges Faced by Learners and Their Oral Expression Skills?*

To explore this question, the relationship between the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and their oral expression skills was examined. Data were collected using the scores from the oral expression skills observation checklist and the students' questionnaire, and the following hypothesis was tested:

There is a statistically significant correlation at the level of 0.05 between the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and their oral expression skills.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.695, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This result indicates a strong positive correlation between the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners and their oral expression skills.

The significant positive correlation suggests that as the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners increase, their oral expression skills are adversely impacted. The researcher attributes this correlation to several factors inherent to the pandemic-driven shift to online learning. One of the key challenges was the inability to adequately meet learners' cognitive and academic needs, limiting their opportunities for active engagement and practical application of oral expression skills. Furthermore, learners struggled with retaining electronically delivered information and accessing it effectively when needed, which likely hindered their ability to apply oral expression skills in real-world or classroom settings. The lack of direct interaction with instructors and peers also reduced opportunities for practicing oral expression in a supportive environment.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing the specific challenges that hinder oral expression skill development, particularly in remote learning contexts. Providing learners with structured opportunities for practice, interactive feedback, and enhanced cognitive engagement could mitigate the impact of these challenges on their oral language abilities.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners during the COVID-19 pandemic and their relationship with digital technology and oral expression skills. The findings revealed that both faculty members and students perceived these challenges to be at an average level. Among the various challenges identified, classroom and extracurricular language activities were seen as the most significant from the faculty members' perspective, while language skills were the most prominent concern for students. Challenges related to direct attendance, teaching methods, content, and assessment were also identified, with specific concerns varying between faculty members and students. For instance, faculty members highlighted issues such as the fear of infection during direct attendance and the lack of familiarity with digital teaching methods, while students noted complaints about excessive holidays and insufficient integration of teaching methods across subjects.

The study also found no statistically significant differences in the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners based on academic level, nationality, or cumulative GPA. Furthermore, no statistically significant correlation was observed between the challenges and digital technology skills as measured through observation. However, a significant correlation was found when digital technology skills were assessed through testing. Additionally, a positive and statistically significant correlation was observed between the challenges faced by learners and their oral expression skills, suggesting that these challenges may hinder learners' ability to effectively engage in oral language practices.

In light of these findings, several recommendations are proposed to mitigate the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners. First, institutions should implement strategies to reduce challenges related to classroom and extracurricular language activities by increasing the time allocated for such practices and enhancing their implementation. Second, mechanisms should be developed to address challenges related to language skills, including providing immediate feedback on language errors. Third, institutions should address challenges related to direct attendance by alleviating students' fears of infection and minimizing disruptions caused by excessive holidays.

Moreover, faculty members should receive training to enhance their familiarity with digital teaching methods and integrate these approaches effectively with traditional ones. The adoption of integrated teaching methods that connect Arabic with other subjects could further enrich learners' experiences. Additionally, curriculum content should be digitally enhanced to align with the unique demands of online education and integrated with Arabic language curricula.

Assessment practices should also be refined to ensure they measure learners' abilities to analyze, synthesize, and create, rather than simply recall information. A unified grading guide should be developed to standardize correction and grading processes. These measures will help address the challenges related to both content and assessment, improving the overall learning experience for non-native Arabic learners.

Building on the findings of this study, several areas for future research are suggested. First, the impact of face-to-face education on the academic achievement of non-native Arabic learners warrants further investigation. Second, a proposed program should be developed to address the challenges faced by non-native Arabic learners in e-learning contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, the effectiveness of strategies based on digital technology in enhancing oral expression skills among non-native Arabic learners should be explored. Lastly, the role of digital content in developing digital technology skills for non-native Arabic learners represents another promising area for research.

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