the Echoes of Environment: Ibn Khaldun's Wisdom on Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of language environment exposure on the acquisition of Arabic for non-native speakers, drawing on the insights of Ibn Khaldun, a 14th-century Muslim scholar, who discussed language acquisition and its challenges long before modern debates emerged. According to Khaldun, the farther a learner is from Arabic-speaking regions, the more difficult it is to master the language. Utilizing a quantitative research approach, this study analyzes Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah alongside relevant literature. The findings reveal that exposure to a natural language environment significantly enhances language acquisition. This research aims to provide effective strategies for Arabic language learners, enabling them to learn the language more efficiently and proficiently. The results highlight the importance of integrating both artificial and natural language environments to achieve comprehensive language proficiency.

Kata kunci: *language acquisition, Ibn Khaldun, Arabic learning, language environment, non-native speakers*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak paparan lingkungan bahasa terhadap perolehan bahasa Arab bagi penutur bukan asli, dengan mengambil wawasan dari Ibn Khaldun, seorang sarjana Muslim abad ke-14, yang membahas perolehan bahasa dan tantangannya jauh sebelum debat modern muncul. Menurut Khaldun, semakin jauh seorang pembelajar dari wilayah berbahasa Arab, semakin sulit untuk menguasai bahasa tersebut. Menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kuantitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun beserta literatur yang relevan. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa paparan lingkungan bahasa alami secara signifikan meningkatkan perolehan bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan strategi efektif bagi pembelajar bahasa Arab, memungkinkan mereka untuk belajar bahasa tersebut dengan lebih efisien dan mahir. Hasilnya menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan lingkungan bahasa buatan dan alami untuk mencapai kemahiran bahasa yang komprehensif.

Keywords: *perolehan bahasa, Ibn Khaldun, pembelajaran bahasa Arab, lingkungan bahasa, penutur bukan asli*

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important legacies of human civilization. Through language, humans can convey their intentions, ideas, and feelings to other people. Ibn Jinni, a classical linguist, stated that language is a system of sound symbols used by humans to convey their goals. Thus, language is not only a communication tool but also a conductor in the spread of knowledge and culture, as well as strengthening social relations (Damhuri & Bahri, 2021; Jinnī, 2013; Ponny, 2022).

In the development of modern linguistics, Noam Chomsky introduced the concept of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in language acquisition. Chomsky argued that humans are born with an innate device that enables them to learn language. Even though this theory has received a significant amount of attention., quite a few linguists have doubted it. They argue that the process of language acquisition is very complex and influenced by various factors, including social interactions and the environment (Chomsky, 1972; Hidayah et al., 2021).

Bruner and Lev Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction in language acquisition. They argue that children learn language through communication with others in their social environment. B.F. Skinner, a behaviorist, also criticized Chomsky's LAD theory. According to Skinner, language is acquired through experience and environmental exposure, not through innate mechanisms. This approach highlights the important role of the environment in the language-learning process (Chomsky, 1972; Hidayah et al., 2021; Vargas, 2017).

Interestingly, long before these modern theories emerged, Ibn Khaldun, a 14th-century Muslim scholar, had discussed language acquisition in his famous work, Muqaddimah. Ibn Khaldun highlighted the importance of exposure to the language environment in improving one's language skills. He believes that a person's ability to master a language is greatly influenced by how close they are to that language environment. Ibn Khaldun stated that the further a student is from an Arabic-speaking area, the more difficult it is for them to master Arabic well. This opinion underscores the significant role of the language environment in the language acquisition process. (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

Ibn Khaldun stated that the further a student is from an Arabic-speaking area In his work, the more difficult it is for them to master Arabic well. This opinion underscores the significant role of the language environment in the language acquisition process. (Khaldûn et al., 2020). While modern theories of language acquisition have explored the roles of innate mechanisms and environmental factors, there has been limited integration of classical perspectives, such as those of Ibn Khaldun, into contemporary discussions. Previous studies have primarily focused on the debate between innate mechanisms and environmental factors without adequately considering the historical

insights provided by scholars like Ibn Khaldun. This research aims to bridge this gap by examining Ibn Khaldun's views on language acquisition and their relevance in the modern context.

This study focuses on the language environment and Arabic language acquisition from Ibn Khaldun's perspective as presented in his Muqaddimah. The research aims to explore Ibn Khaldun's views on language acquisition more deeply and assess their relevance to modern theories and practices. By understanding the importance of exposure to the language environment, students can utilize various resources and language environments available to improve their language skills effectively and efficiently. Additionally, this research can contribute to developing language acquisition methods that are more appropriate for contemporary needs.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach and a literature review (Library Research). The primary data source is the *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun, which provides insights into his views on language acquisition and the influence of the environment on language abilities. Secondary data sources include books, magazines, journals, and scientific articles related to the research topic. These secondary sources encompass relevant previous research, modern linguistic theories, and scientific articles discussing language acquisition and its influencing factors (Mustofa et al., 2023).

The primary data source in this study is the *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun, which is used to explore Ibn Khaldun's views regarding language acquisition and the influence of the environment on a person's language abilities. Secondary data sources include books, magazines, journals, and scientific articles related to the research topic. This secondary literature includes relevant previous research, modern linguistic theories, and scientific articles that discuss the concept of language acquisition and the factors that influence it.

This research began with collecting data, as well as literature relevant to the research topic, including the Muqaddimah Book and various other secondary sources. Next, a content analysis of the Muqaddimah was carried out to understand Ibn Khaldun's views on language acquisition and the influence of the language environment. Critical analysis was also carried out on selected secondary sources to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing language acquisition and related theories. Conclusions are drawn based on the results of analysis and comparison of the theories of other linguists.

This research has significant implications for language learning practices, especially in enhancing Arabic language skills for non-native speakers. By highlighting the importance of the language environment, the study provides new insights for Arabic language learners to utilize available resources effectively. The findings aim to

contribute to developing more effective language acquisition methods, bridging classical thoughts and modern theories, and enriching academic discourse on the role of the environment in language acquisition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ibn Khaldun and His Legacy

Ibn Khaldun, also known as Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun Al-Maghribi Al- Hadrami Al-Maliki, was a multidimensional intellectual whose works have stood the test of time. Born on Ramadan 732 H in Tunisia, he hailed from a highly influential and famous family involved in the conquest of Andalusia. Ibn Khaldun's lineage traced back to one of the oldest Arab tribes in Yemen, and he grew up immersed in the rich traditions and fortunate destiny of his family line (Enan, 2013; Khaldûn et al., 2020; Lestari et al., 2023).

Ibn Khaldun received education from his father, Abu Abdullah Muhammad, who not only imparted him with the fundamentals of Islam such as Quranic exegesis, hadith, and jurisprudence but also instilled in him a love for learning. As a multidimensional scholar, Ibn Khaldun delved into various disciplines, mastering the science of hadith, the jurisprudence of Imam Malik, the Arabic language, logic, philosophy, and also governance and teaching. His thirst for knowledge led him to study under the tutelage of many renowned and influential scholars in Andalusia, such as Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Sa'ad, Muhammad Al-Syawwasy, Ahmad Ibn Al-Qassar, Sheikh Samsuddin Abu Abdullah Muhammad Al-Wadiysyi, Abdullah Muhammad bin Abdussalam, Muhammad Ibn Sulaiman Al-Satti, Abd Al-Muhaimin Al-Hadrami, and Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al-Alibi (Khaldûn et al., 2020; Ulfa et al., 2021).

Ibn Khaldun's intellectual prowess caught the attention of Sultan Abu Hammu, the highest-ranking official in the government, who invited him to join his cabinet. However, Ibn Khaldun declined the offer, as he wanted to focus on his scholarly pursuits and writing. This decision further underscores his commitment to academic excellence and the pursuit of knowledge. Throughout his life, Ibn Khaldun served in the political and governmental arena, holding administrative positions in various places he lived, both in Maghrib and Andalusia. However, his true passion lay in scholarly pursuits, as reflected in his monumental work, the Muqaddimah. This seminal work comprehensively discusses the history of Islamic civilization, its progress, and decline through the ages, and offers a complex classification of knowledge (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

The *Muqaddimah*, which serves as the introductory book to Ibn *Khaldun's Al-'Ibar*, has garnered worldwide recognition. It is highly regarded for its enduring relevance to modern life, making Ibn Khaldun a figure who excelled not only as an academic but also as a statesman, historian, sociologist, linguist and philosopher. Ibn Khaldun resided in

Egypt for 23 years and passed away on the 25th of Ramadan, 784 H. Despite his physical departure, his scholarly legacy lives on. The *Muqaddimah* continues to be widely studied and discussed, not only for its historical content but also for its universal insights into the development of human civilization (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

Comprising three significant parts, the *Muqaddimah* covers historical issues, delving into the progress and decline of Islamic civilization, cultural scholarly issues based on Ibn Khaldun's history of scholarship, and the institutions and knowledge of Islam in the 14th century. Ibn Khaldun's contributions to academia and his comprehensive understanding of various fields have made him a revered figure. His early mastery of the Quran provided a strong foundation for his scholarly pursuits, allowing him to become a prominent figure in politics, sociology, and economics. His theories, which were articulated centuries before those of modern scholars such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Max Weber, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx, remain relevant and continue to shape our understanding of the world today (Enan, 2013; Irwin, 2019). In the 21st century, the name Ibn Khaldun endures, and his ideas continue to inspire thinkers and scholars worldwide. The Muqaddimah, with its universal exploration of the history of human civilization, remains a seminal work in the field of knowledge, ensuring that Ibn Khaldun's intellectual legacy stands the test of time.

Language Acquisition and Environment

Language acquisition is a complex and profound process, influenced by several interacting factors. Linguistic experts have observed that the social environment plays a key role in language learning. Daily interactions with family, peers, and community provide learners with diverse and in-depth language exposure. Apart from that, cognitive factors such as information processing and attention also play a role in the process of understanding and using language (Rachmawati, 2022).

In Nativism theory, Noam Chomsky emphasizes that humans are born with an innate ability to understand and use language. This theory highlights the importance of biological aspects in language acquisition, including brain structure and genetic factors that influence an individual's language abilities. Nativism theory emphasizes that language is not the result of learning or experience, but is an intrinsic property of the human mind. Chomsky showed that children can produce sentences they have never heard before, and this indicates the existence of innate linguistic knowledge (Chomsky, 1972; Hasanah, 2006; Hidayah et al., 2021).

The theory of language acquisition proposed by B.F. Skinner emphasized the role of behaviorist principles in the language learning process. Skinner argued that language is learned through external stimuli and the responses produced by the individual. According to him, individuals acquire language through a process of operant

conditioning, where language behavior is influenced by the consequences of those actions. When a child says the correct words and a positive response from the environment follows, this reinforces the behavior, encouraging the child to repeat the behavior in the future. Skinner emphasized that reinforcement, both positive and negative, plays an important role in shaping and strengthening language behavior. Within the framework of behaviorist theory, the language learning process is understood as a continuous response-learning process, where the relationship between the language stimulus and the individual's verbal response is formed through continuous learning experiences (Habibah, 2016; Jelita et al., 2023; Mahmudi, 2016; Vargas, 2017).

As for language acquisition, Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the role of social interaction and the cultural environment in language learning. According to Vygotsky, the process of language acquisition is influenced by the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the distance between an individual's ability to perform a task independently and what they can achieve with the help of others with more experience or cultural knowledge. In the context of the ZPD, Vygotsky emphasized the important role of social interactions, such as conversations with adults or peers, in helping children understand and use language. These interactions provide opportunities for children to learn from others, internalize language rules and structures, and develop a deeper understanding of language. (Lemke, 2020).

Khaldun in his muqaddimah has discussed several theories of language acquisition and learning according to many linguists before modern linguists debate them today. As an empirical and rationalist Islamic scientist, Ibn Khaldun prioritized scientific evidence in every statement he shared in his Muqaddimah. He stated that humans have the natural ability to speak and speak through his theory of *Malakah*. According to *Malakah*'s theory, humans have an innate predisposition for language, but Ibn Khaldun also does not deny the important role of the environment and social interaction in language development this ability. Ibn Khaldun's views reflect a balance between innate factors and environmental influences, suggesting that both play a significant role in language acquisition (Khaldûn et al., 2020; Lisaniyyah et al., 2018).

Ibn Khaldun emphasized that language is one of the main aspects that distinguishes humans from other creatures. In his theory about *Malakah*, explains that language ability is part of human nature which is gifted by God. However, this ability needs to be honed and developed through learning and practice. Ibn Khaldun believes that the social environment and interaction with other people are the key to honing one's language skills. Children learn language from their parents, teachers, and environment through imitation process and repetition. This suggests that, although there are innate aspects to language abilities, social interaction, and learning still play an important role in developing and refining these abilities (Fradana, 2023; Haryati et

al., 2023; Khaldûn et al., 2020).

Based on Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldun's study, it was found that not only innate factors can influence a person's language abilities, but exposure to an Arabic-speaking environment and social interaction can improve human language or innate abilities, thereby increasing a person's language competence. Ibn Khaldun emphasized learning Arabic in its natural environment. The farther an Arabic student is from the Arabic language environment, the higher the difficulty level in learning it. He stated that studying Arabic is not studying Nahwu Science, learning good Arabic is by mixing directly with native speakers and an Arabic-speaking environment (Khaldûn et al., 2020). Ibn Khaldun explained that studying Arabic in a non-Arab country would damage the authenticity of the Arabic language itself so that the level of proficiency in Arabic would be lower than those who studied Arabic from where they came from. such as the destruction of the Arabic language due to the mixing of Mudhar languages (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

Acquiring Arabic language skills according to Ibn Khaldun does not require formal teaching, because Arabic language ability is something natural or *Malakah*. Ibn Khaldun differentiated between authenticity in Arabic and knowledge of Arabic. According to him, native Arabic language skills do not require formal teaching and cannot be taught through conventional methods. Ibn Khaldun proved his views by observing language learners studying aspects of Arabic grammar such as i'rab, fa'il, maf'ul, and majrur. Even though they studied these theories, they did not have good Arabic instincts or *Malakah*. This is because the *i'rab* material is theoretical and only functions as a means for teaching. In contrast, *Malakah* is practical and can only be acquired through direct conversation with native Arabic speakers or by memorizing their words (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

Arabic language development learning today has spread widely abroad, including in Indonesia. Learning Arabic in Indonesia, which is far from its native language environment, often makes things difficult for students. As a result, they only focus on theoretical knowledge of Arabic without succeeding in achieving *Malakah* or authenticity in Arabic. To obtain good language, every language learner needs a supportive language environment.

The language environment includes everything that can be heard and seen that influences the language communication process. Modern linguistic experts agree that the language environment greatly influences the language learning process. Piaget, for example, revealed that the learning environment can provide a variety of experiences and interactions that stimulate cognitive development and support language acquisition. Thus, the existence of a rich and interactive language environment is very important for Arabic language learners to develop various skills in their language authentically (Abdullah, 2020)(Astuti, 2022). According to Krashen, the language

environment is not only the native environment in the country of origin. He revealed that there are two types of language environments, namely natural and artificial environments (Krashen, 1981; Setiyadi & Salim, 2013).

Natural language environments are environments where language is learned informally through everyday interactions with native speakers in real-life contexts. These environments include situations such as conversations with friends, social activities, media, and other everyday experiences where language is used naturally. According to Krashen, natural language environments are more effective in helping learners achieve language proficiency because they allow them to learn through contextual and practical use. In contrast, an artificial language environment is an environment that is created for language learning specifically. This includes classrooms, language programs, language laboratories, and specially designed learning materials. This environment is controlled and directed by the instructor or teacher, with a focus on grammar rules, vocabulary, and structured exercises. While effective in providing the basics of language, these environments are often lacking in providing natural context and practical use of language in daily life (Habibah, 2016; Krashen, 1976).

Artificial language environments include specially designed classrooms, language programs, language laboratories, as well as structured learning materials. In this environment, learners receive clear instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills through a variety of teaching methods that have been proven effective. The instructor or teacher can control and direct the learning process to ensure that students understand and master important aspects of the Arabic language (Krashen, 1976; Setiyadi & Salim, 2013; Sutrisna, 2021).

By creating situations similar to natural language environments, artificial language environments enable learners to practice Arabic intensively and continuously. For example, through daily conversation simulations, role-playing, and listening and speaking exercises, students can develop their Arabic malakah or authenticity. In addition, the use of technology such as language learning applications and online platforms can also enrich the learning experience.

Thus, the integration of an artificial language environment in Arabic language learning in Indonesia can provide significant benefits. Learners not only gain theoretical knowledge but are also able to develop the practical skills necessary to communicate effectively in Arabic. This will help them achieve higher language proficiency and improve their ability to use Arabic in various contexts.

The Concept of *Malakah* on Language Acquisition

In his monumental work, Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun put forward the concept of *Malakah* as a factor influencing the transformation and decline of civilization. *Malakah*, in Ibn Khaldun's view, refers to the traits or characteristics possessed by human groups

in society. Ibn Khaldun observed that human societies have fundamental differences in characteristics, which he called *Malakah* (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

The concept of *Malakah* in Ibn Khaldun is categorized into five parts, namely *Malakah* lisaniyah, *Malakah* sina'iyyah, *Malakah* ilmiyah, *Malakah* al-ta'ah and *Malakah* imaniyah. *Malakah* Lisaniyyah is the management of the tongue including communication skills and linguistic skills, both orally and in writing. *Malakah* Sina'iyyah in the fifth and sixth chapters of his Muqaddimah, everything related to a person's skills, such as special skills that a professional teacher needs to have. *Malakah* Ilmiyyah refers to a person's strong grip on the sources of knowledge. This is in line with the goals of Islamic Education, which emphasize the importance of elevating the dignity of the Koran and Sunnah as the main basis in the lifelong learning process. *Malakah* Al-Ta'ah is a very important skill for someone to become a superior Muslim human being. Al-Ta'ah means obedience, submission, submission, and humility to Allah SWT, which is realized through carrying out commands and rejecting prohibitions as stipulated in the Koran and Sunnah of Rasulullah SAW. This obedience must be carried out continuously throughout life, reflecting submission and deep love for Allah SWT. *Malakah* Imaniyah is an ability related to deep and steady faith in Allah SWT. This includes a firm belief in the principles of faith in Islam, including belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and His qada' and qadar. This strong faith encourages a person to have attitudes and behavior that are in line with Islamic teachings, showing steadfastness in facing life's trials, as well as peace of mind that comes from unshakable belief. *Malakah* Imaniyah is the foundation for a Muslim to live his life with meaning and piety, guiding his every action by the will of Allah SWT (Khaldûn et al., 2020; Lisaniyyah et al., 2018).

Ibn Khaldun used the concept of *Malakah* to explain why civilizations move through cycles of transformation that occur through several stages, including birth, growth, peak, decline, and destruction. In his view, changes in *Malakah* can lead to changes in human characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses, which in turn affect the stability and continuity of civilization. His thoughts on *Malakah* provide important insights into understanding and explaining why human civilizations can rise and fall. This concept also highlights the complex relationship between individuals and their social environment, as well as the role of social and cultural factors in shaping the development of society.

In the context of language learning and acquisition, the *Malakah* of a human child greatly influences the good and bad of his language skills. However, Ibn Khaldun emphasized that language is an ability and privilege that humans have, and authenticity that can be cultivated through the learning and education process (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

Ibn Khaldun's studies are in sharp contrast to historical studies, always emphasizing his opinions with historical evidence he obtained in the field. Likewise, in

the process of effort that a person makes to learn a language, according to his study, *Malakah* lisaniyah can be created and obtained only if language learners, especially Arabic, repeat their oral language in Arabic so that the values of *Malakah* lisaniyah can be firmly embedded in them (Khaldûn et al., 2020).

The concept of *Malakah* in the Arabic language learning process is the process of language acquisition through capital given by God to a person through the senses he has, this is in line with the thoughts of Noam Chomsky's Nativism theory which emphasizes that humans learn language through the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) as a provision. natural or innate ideas and innate knowledge (Haryati et al., 2023; Khaldûn et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Learning Arabic in Indonesia faces special challenges because of the distance from the native language environment. Students often only focus on theoretical knowledge without achieving proficiency or authenticity in the language. To overcome this, it is very important to create a supportive language environment. In Ibn Khaldun's view, language ability is innate but still requires a social environment and interaction to develop well. This opinion is supported by modern linguistics experts such as Piaget, who emphasize the importance of interactive learning environments for cognitive development and language acquisition.

Stephen Krashen divides the language environment into two: artificial and natural. Artificial environments involve structured learning in the classroom, while natural environments involve the use of language in the context of everyday life. These two types of environments complement each other in supporting the holistic development of language skills. Therefore, this research proposes that combining artificial and natural environmental approaches to learning Arabic can help students in Indonesia develop their language skills more effectively. A rich and interactive language environment, whether specially created or naturally occurring, is essential to achieving proficiency and authenticity in Arabic.

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