



OPEN ACCESS

Studies in Technology and Education

Volume 4, Issue 1, 2025 | <https://www.azalpub.com/index.php/ste>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE JOURNEY OF MAGUINDANAON STUDENTS IN LEARNING ARABIC AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

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Article Info

Received:

March 12, 2025

Accepted:

April 16, 2025

Published:

May 31, 2025

Keywords

Bilingual Education
Linguistic Competence
Maguindanaon Students
Religious
Phenomenology

Suggested Citation:

Balayanan, A. M., & Lumbu-an, J. D. (2025). The journey of Maguindanaon students in learning Arabic and English languages. *Studies in Technology and Education*, 4(1). 72-81.

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of Maguindanaon students at Pimbalayan National High School in achieving balanced proficiency in Arabic and English during the 2024–2025 academic year. The purpose is to understand how these students navigate the dual demands of religious and secular education through bilingual acquisition. The research addresses the problem of limited integration between faith-based and academic instruction, which poses challenges to students' linguistic development and cultural preservation. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach guided by Moustakas' (1994) framework, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Participants were selected based on defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure diverse and representative perspectives. Findings reveal that despite encountering linguistic barriers, financial hardships, and limited educational resources, students demonstrate resilience supported by family, community, and institutional structures. Their bilingual proficiency fosters aspirations in both religious and professional fields, highlighting language as a bridge between identity and future goals. The study concludes that a supportive, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environment enhances both academic performance and personal development. Its significance lies in informing educational policies and practices aimed at strengthening bilingual education for marginalized communities, ultimately promoting equity, inclusion, and empowerment through language.

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INTRODUCTION

Language learning is fundamental to human civilization, shaping communication, identity, and access to knowledge. English is the global language of business and education, while Arabic is essential for understanding the Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims. Acquiring both languages is crucial for fulfilling educational, professional, and religious responsibilities.

Research highlights the benefits of bilingualism, particularly in fostering intercultural understanding (Graddol, 2019; Baker, 2016) and enhancing identity, communication, and access to economic and educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2018; Crystal, 2017). Bilingualism also improves cognitive skills such as problem-solving and multitasking (Bialystok, 2018; Green, 2021) and provides a competitive advantage in the global job market (Smith, 2019). Additionally, it strengthens cross-cultural communication and appreciation of diverse traditions (Prestoza, 2025; Grosjean, 2022).

Studies across different regions highlight factors affecting language acquisition. In Iran, Othman (2019) found that cultural and social influences significantly shape language development among Muslim youth. In Indonesia, Almalki and Mearaj (2017) emphasized the role of teaching methods and cultural integration in Arabic language learning. In Europe, Lindgren et al. (2023) identified cognitive overload and a lack of trained teachers as barriers to multilingual education. Similarly, UNESCO (2023) notes that while multilingual education fosters inclusivity, limited learning materials and unqualified teachers hinder students' progress.

With over 175 languages, the Philippines has a highly diverse linguistic landscape (Lasaten, 2017). Filipinos are generally proficient in both Filipino and English (Gonzales, 2023), along with their indigenous languages (Martin, 2014). However, specific studies on Maguindanaon learners remain scarce, despite the broader recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity in education. To support Muslim education, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have institutionalized the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) under DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017, integrating Arabic instruction with core subjects. However, research gaps persist in understanding how cultural and social factors influence multilingual education among marginalized communities, particularly Maguindanaon students (González et al., 2015).

Muslim parents in the Philippines commonly enroll their children in mainstream schools on weekdays while sending them to Madrasah or Arabic schools on weekends to ensure they learn Arabic, which is essential for religious practice (Saleh, 2016). This dual learning pattern is evident in Pimbalayan National High School, where a significant portion of the student population participates in both secular and religious education. According to the School Learners Information System (2024), 788 of the 855 students are Maguindanaon, with 555 (70%) enrolled in Madrasah schools where Arabic is the primary language of instruction.

This study explores the linguistic experiences of Maguindanaon students as they navigate Arabic-English language acquisition. The findings may inform policy recommendations to promote inclusive and effective education for multicultural learners. By amplifying their voices, this research aims to empower Muslim students, address linguistic challenges, and emphasize the importance of preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study described the lived experiences of Maguindanaon students learning Arabic and English languages at Pimbalayan National High School, Lambayong Cluster, Division of Sultan Kudarat during the school year 2024-2025. Specifically, this answered the following questions:

1. What is the lifeworld of Maguindanaon students learning Arabic and English languages at Pimbalayan National High School?
2. What are the contexts of the lifeworld of Maguindanaon students learning Arabic and English languages at Pimbalayan National High School?
3. How do students view themselves in the future?

METHODOLOGY

During the conduct of this study, Purposive Sampling Technique was intentionally utilized. This method, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling where researchers use their discretion to select individuals who best represent the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2015). According to Moustakas (1994), who developed the Transcendental Phenomenological Approach, qualitative studies typically involve a sample of 5 to 25 participants who have directly experienced the phenomenon being explored.

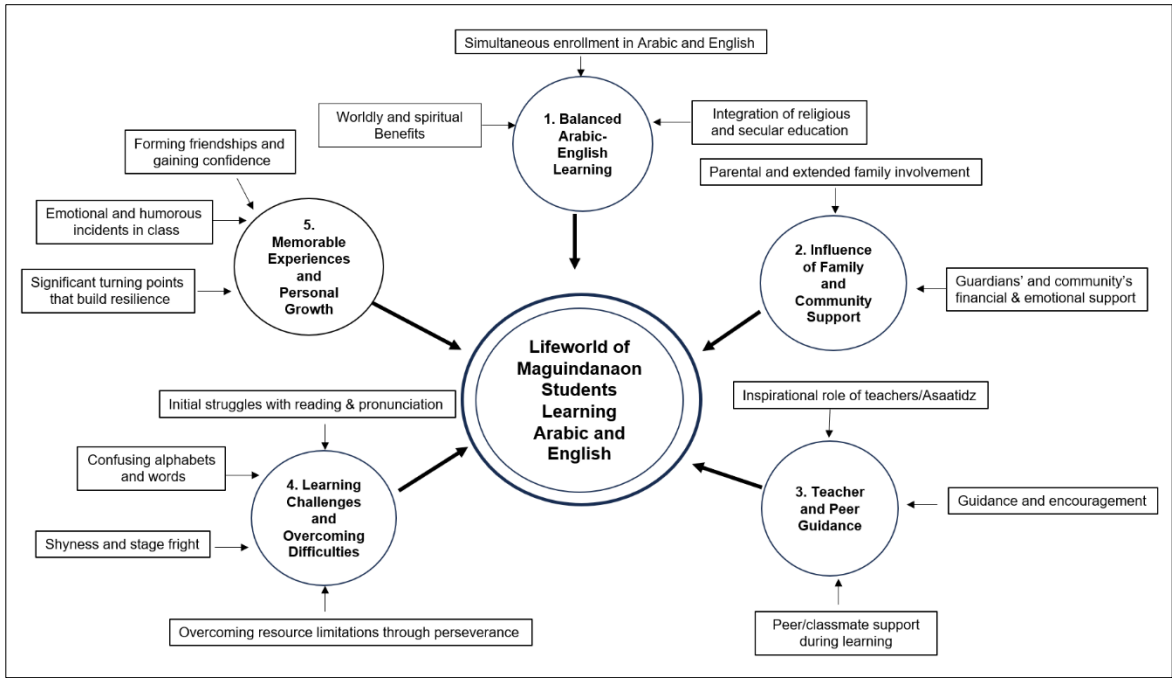
In this study, the researcher selected ten (10) students as participants, applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the chosen individuals have relevant experiences that align with the research objectives. By focusing on Maguindanaon learners who are exposed to Arabic and English, the purposive sampling technique will facilitate a nuanced exploration of how these students navigate their multilingual environment.

In this study, the researcher navigated the experiences of Maguindanaon students in acquiring Arabic and English languages. A validated semi-structured questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) guide were used in gathering the needed data. The researcher selected participants based in the criteria set. The semi-structured questionnaire, data analysis framework and procedures were adopted from the work of Moustakas (1994) who is the proponent of Transcendental Phenomenological approach.

RESULTS

Through careful data analysis and interpretation, five emerging themes on the lifeworld of Maguindanaon students learning Arabic and English languages at Pimbalayan National High School were identified.

Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of Lifeworld of Maguindanaon Students Learning Arabic and English Languages at Pimbalayan National High School

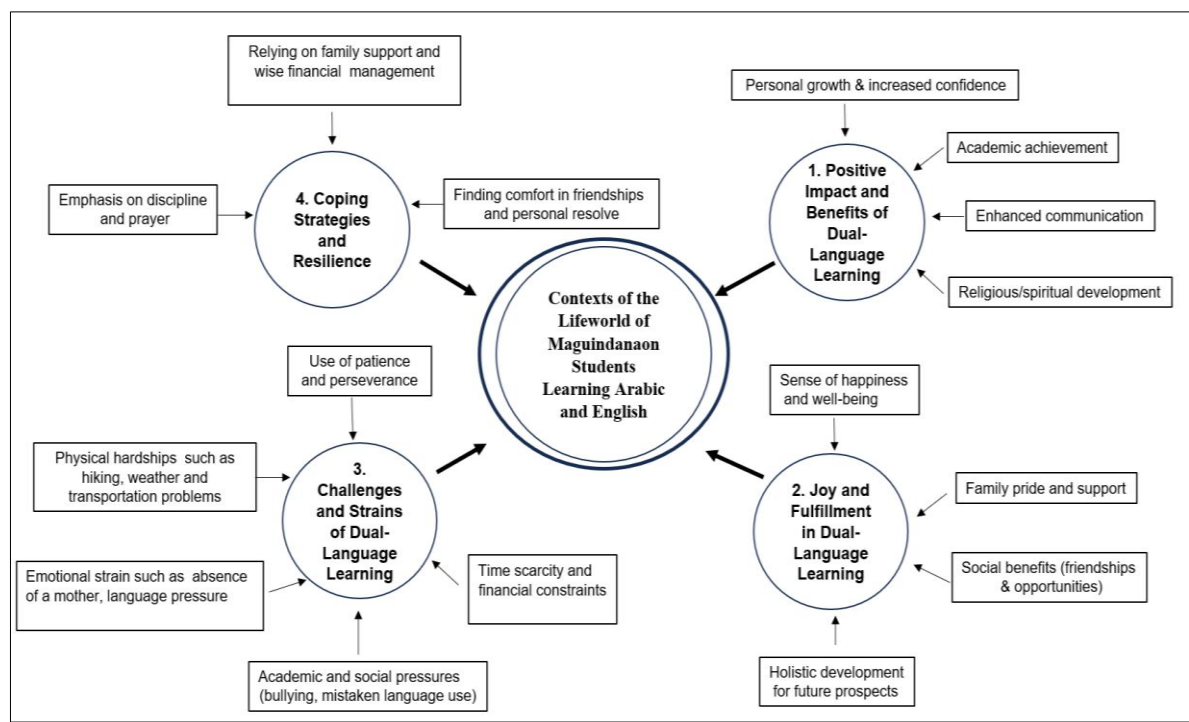


These themes include Balanced Arabic-English Learning, the Influence of Family and Community Support, Teacher and Peer Guidance, Learning Challenges and Overcoming Difficulties, and Memorable Experiences and Personal Growth. Together, they illustrate a complex learning process that not only emphasizes the academic integration of two distinct languages but also highlights the critical role of family, community, educators, and peers. This comprehensive approach reflects how students navigate and overcome various challenges, ultimately fostering significant personal growth and creating memorable educational experiences.

Emerging Themes on the Contexts of the Lifeworld of Maguindanaon Students Learning Arabic and English at Pimbalayan National High School

Through careful data analysis and interpretation, four emerging themes on the contexts of the lifeworld of Maguindanaon students learning Arabic and English at Pimbalayan National High School were identified. These themes include Positive Impact and Benefits of Arabic-English Learning, Joy and Fulfillment in Arabic-English Learning, Challenges and Strains of Arabic-English Learning, and Coping Strategies and Resilience. Collectively, these themes reveal that while the Arabic-English approach offers significant advantages and a sense of joy, it also brings inherent challenges and strains. Importantly, the students actively employ various coping strategies, demonstrating resilience as they navigate the complexities of learning in a bilingual environment.

Figure 2. Schematic Diagram of Contexts of the Lifeworld of Maguindanaon Students Learning Arabic and English at Pimbalayan National High School

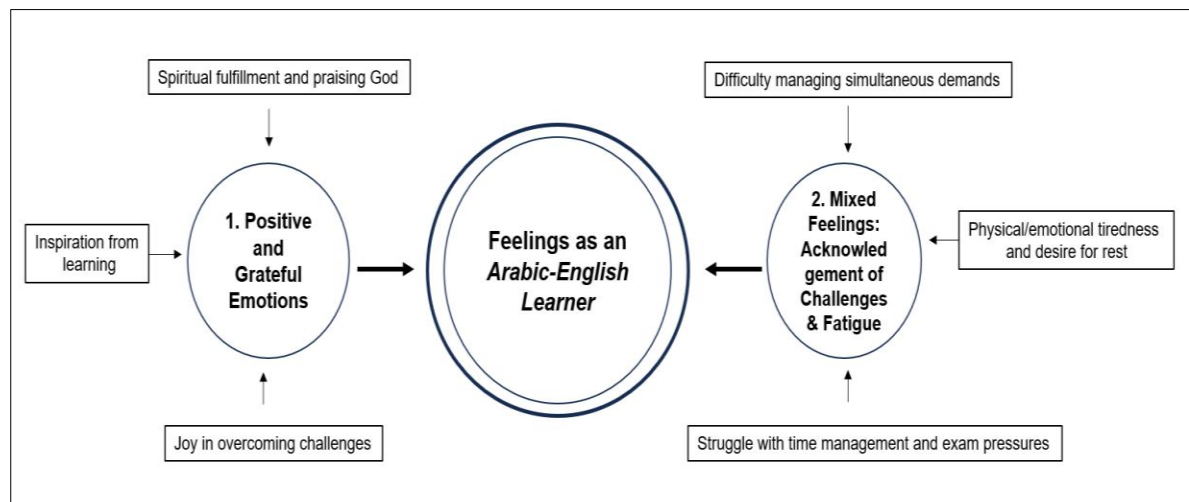


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Emerging Themes on the Future Views of the Maguindanaon Students

Two separate diagrams were used to answer research question number 3 regarding the emerging themes on the future views of the participants. Diagram 3.1, titled "Feelings as a Arabic-English Learner," identified two key themes: Positive and Grateful Emotions, and Mixed Feelings: Acknowledgement of Challenges & Fatigue. Diagram 3.2, titled "Future Aspirations as a Arabic-English Learner," revealed two additional themes: Ambitious Dual-Career Aspirations and Commitment to Family & Community Well-Being. Together, these findings illustrate that while participants appreciate and are grateful for their Arabic-English learning experiences, they also recognize inherent challenges. Furthermore, their future aspirations reflect both career ambitions and a strong commitment to the well-being of their families and communities.

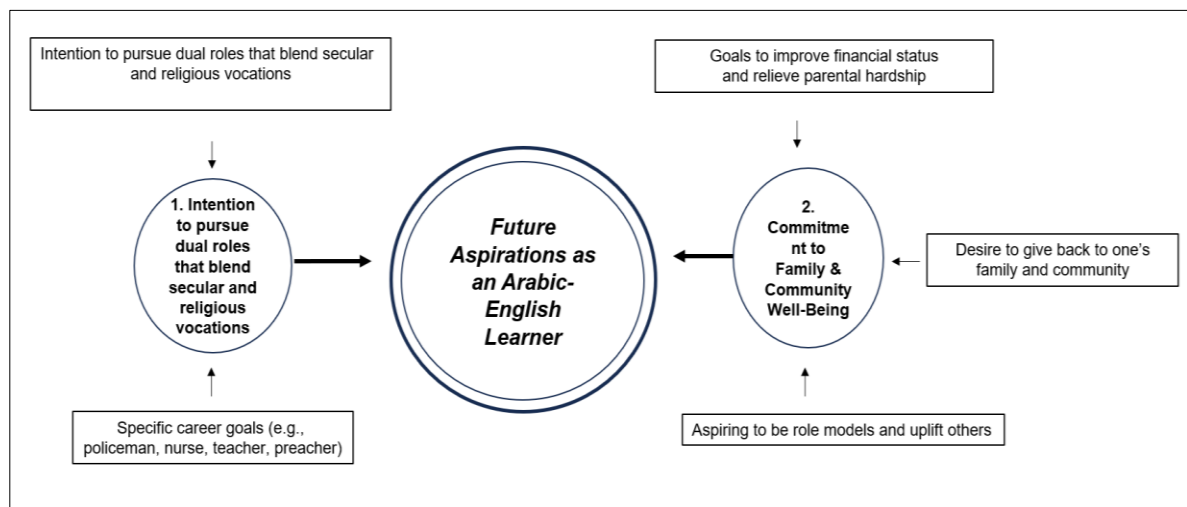
Figure 3. Schematic Diagram Feelings as an Arabic and English Learner



This shows that many students feel deeply positive about their Arabic-English education. They experience spiritual fulfillment, inspiration from learning, and joy in overcoming challenges. Using terms like “praise be to God”, “feel great”, “inspired”, and “I feel good”, the students express that their learning experience in both Arabic and English lifts their spirits and motivates them. In the context of this study, these emotions not only reflect personal satisfaction but also indicate how their academic efforts bring joy to their families and a hopeful outlook for the future.

However it also captures the reality that while students appreciate the learning opportunities, they also face significant challenges and exhaustion from managing simultaneous demands. They experience physical and emotional tiredness, struggle with time management, and feel the pressure of exam periods. Terms like “difficult”, “tired”, “struggle”, “tiresome”, and “I think of leaving... for rest days” express how the workload and pressures sometimes lead to mixed feelings. These mixed feelings reveal that while students remain committed to their education, the demands of Arabic-English learning often result in fatigue and the need for rest.

Figure 4. Schematic Diagram of Future Aspirations as an Arabic and English Learner



This diagram reflects how students envision pursuing careers that blend both secular and religious vocations. They express specific career goals, such as becoming a policewoman, nurse, teacher, or even a preacher, and aim to integrate both educational streams into their future professions. The participants' responses include terms like "policeman," "Arabic teacher and policewoman," "nurse," "female preacher," "Mufti Menk," and "professional" to capture these ambitions. These aspirations indicate that students are not only focused on academic and personal growth but are also planning to serve their communities by merging practical skills with spiritual guidance.

It also captures the students' strong desire to give back to their families and communities. It reflects their goal to improve their financial status, relieve parental hardship, and serve as role models who uplift others. Using phrases such as "not forget where I came from", "relieve my parents from hardship", "give them a comfortable living", "uplift the economy", and "inspiration to the youth", the students express a commitment that goes beyond personal achievement. In the context of this study, these aspirations indicate that Arabic-English education is not only about individual success but also about building a future that benefits their entire community.

FINDINGS

Based on the findings of the study, the experiences of students learning Arabic and English simultaneously illustrate a complex learning process that not only emphasizes the academic integration of two distinct languages but also highlights the critical role of family, community, educators, and peers. This comprehensive approach reflects how students navigate and overcome various challenges, ultimately fostering significant personal growth and creating memorable educational experiences. The study concludes that the lifeworld of Maguindanaon students is characterized by a unique Arabic-English educational experience that integrates both religious and secular instruction, fostering academic, moral, and cultural growth despite inherent challenges.

In the broader context, while the Arabic-English environment provides significant benefits such as enhanced academic performance, spiritual development, and improved communication skills, it also presents obstacles, including physical hardships, financial constraints, and emotional strain; nevertheless, the students demonstrate resilience through effective coping strategies.

Lastly, students express a balanced vision of the future, combining positive and grateful emotions with an honest acknowledgment of the challenges and fatigue they may encounter. Their ambitions extend to pursuing dual-career paths, reflecting a drive to succeed in both professional arenas while maintaining a balanced life. Additionally, there is a strong commitment to family and community well-being, underscoring a desire to contribute meaningfully to society.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that Maguindanaon students' Arabic-English language acquisition is a complex yet enriching journey shaped by family, community, educators, and peers. Integrating religious and secular instruction fosters linguistic competence, moral values, and cultural identity. Despite financial, physical, and emotional challenges, students demonstrate resilience through effective coping strategies.

Their aspirations reflect a balanced vision of the future, striving for success in both secular and faith-based careers while maintaining strong family and community ties. This

study underscores the need for inclusive, culturally responsive education to support bilingual learners, enhance teaching methodologies, and bridge educational gaps

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