

# Enhancing Academic Excellence: A Case Study on Arabic Proficiency Levels Among the IRK Students and Their Perceptions on Studying Al-Naḥw Wa Al-Şarf In CFS IIUM

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**Abstract:** *One of the common core courses under the Arabic and Islamic Studies (AIS) module that has been introduced and implemented since 2023 is Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf. The introduction of the course to the Foundation of Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK) students at the Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), took place due to a curriculum review exercise during said year. As IRK students take Arabic-medium Islamic studies courses, the course's introduction aims to increase their proficiency in the language. This study aims to evaluate the Arabic language competency of IRK students who took Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf course during their first semester of the academic year. This research utilised a quantitative study, with a survey research design to investigate the perspectives of IRK students regarding Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf course as well as the significance of enrolling in the course for improving their academic achievements. A survey questionnaire titled "IRK Students' Perception on Studying Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf Course" using a Google Form was given to all IRK students to learn about their perceptions of the course. The data demonstrated that taking Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf course enhances students' comprehension of the IRK core courses. Furthermore, the majority of students agreed that learning the course adds value for IRK students. As a result, IRK students' Arabic proficiency increases when they study Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf course.*

**Keywords:** Arabic Proficiency, Academic Excellence, Perceptions, Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf, IRK Students

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## 1. Introduction

In an attempt to compete in a global society, many countries have realised the necessity of producing more graduates who speak multiple languages. Given that Islam is the official religion of the Federation, Malaysia is among the nations committed to studying and preserving the Arabic language. The Arabic language is one of the courses that Malaysian students are exposed to, starting in primary school and continuing through secondary education.

At CFS IIUM, Arabic language proficiency is essential for certain programmes offered by the University, where Arabic is the medium of instruction. In addition, regardless of their programme, all accepted students at CFS IIUM must take the Arabic Proficiency Test (APT)

before starting their foundation studies. Students will not be required to attend Quranic Language courses if they obtain the minimal basic score stipulated by their various programmes. Suppose a student does not meet the minimum basic score. In that case, they will be placed in the relevant Quranic Language levels, according to the Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD). This is because these courses are treated as the main requirement for graduation purposes in English-medium programmes, as well as the Centre requirement in Arabic-medium programmes.

Despite taking Arabic Proficiency Test (APT) and Quranic Language classes, some IRK students appear to struggle with comprehension of the courses that employ Arabic as the primary language of communication, as per the Kulliyah report. A study by Wa'el Al Faqara (2015) looked into the linguistic difficulties Malaysian students encounter when learning Arabic as a foreign language. The study's conclusions demonstrated that diglossia, the differences between the two languages, and the Arabic writing system were just a few of the linguistic obstacles that Malaysian students had to overcome when studying Arabic. Hence, after the curriculum was reviewed in 2023, Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf, one of the common core courses, was later offered to IRK students to help them become more proficient in Arabic.

When it comes to learning Arabic, Al-Naḥw and Al-Ṣarf are the two main elements that are most commonly discussed (Sari, 2017). From its etymology, Al-Naḥw denotes direction and path (Al Fayrūz Ābādī, 1971). It is a means of learning how to construct Arabic phrases and words. On the other hand, Al-Ṣarf is defined as change. Al-Ṣarf, to put it simply, is the science of transforming a statement from its original form into multiple distinct examples according to multiple intended meanings (Mokhammad, 2020). The goal of studying Al-Naḥw and Al-Ṣarf in practice is to apply its knowledge to the ability to read and write Arabic texts. Given that Arabic is the language of the Qur'ān, some people consider it sacred. However, Arabic's origins are thought to date back approximately 3,000 years, before the Qur'ān was revealed (Bello, 2015). This divine transmission was recorded in the Qur'ān (41: 3);

"A Book whose verses have been detailed, an Arabic Qur'ān for people who know. "  
(Sahih International)

Additionally, the prophetic texts, or aḥādīth, were also in Arabic. These two are the main sources of Islamic knowledge that have led experts to conclude that learning and mastering Arabic is a necessary requirement for learning and comprehending Islamic studies (Faisal Ahmad Shah, 2016). Undoubtedly, a significant portion of this legacy has been translated into several languages; yet, it is a well-known reality that translations may not always accurately capture the essence of particular ideas and knowledge. Due to this restriction, students won't be able to comprehend and reach the field's depth, according to Hamidah Mat & Wan Mohammad Ubaidillah (2016). Ahmad Hasan (2008) claims that Al-Naḥw and Al-Ṣarf are primarily used to determine how the texts of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth should be interpreted. It may therefore be significant for a student who enrolled in the IRK programme and completed it with adequate Arabic proficiency.

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْعَزِيزِ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، حَدَّثَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بْنُ سَعْدٍ، عَنِ ابْنِ شِهَابٍ، عَنْ أَنَسٍ، أَنَّ عُمَانَ، دَعَا زَيْدَ بْنَ ثَابِتٍ وَعَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ الزُّبَيْرِ وَسَعِيدَ بْنَ الْعَاصِ وَعَبْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنَ الْحَارِثِ بْنَ هِشَامٍ فَتَسَخَّرُوهُا فِي الْمَصَاحِفِ، وَقَالَ عُمَانُ لِلرُّهْطِ الْفُرَشِيِّينَ الثَّلَاثَةَ إِذَا اخْتَلَفْتُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَزَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ، فَاكْتُبُوهُ بِلِسَانِ قُرَيْشٍ، فَإِنَّمَا نَزَلَ بِلِسَانِهِمْ. فَفَعَلُوا ذَلِكَ.

Narrated Anas: 'Uthmān called Zayd bin Thābit, 'Abd Allāh bin Al-Zubayr, Sa'īd bin Al-'Ās and 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Al-Ḥārith bin Hishām, and then they wrote the manuscripts of the

Holy Qur'ān in the form of book in several copies. 'Uthmān said to the three Qurayshi persons. " If you differ with Zayd bin Thābit on any point of the Qur'ān, then write it in the language of Quraysh, as the Qur'ān was revealed in their language." So, they acted accordingly. (Sa'īd bin Thābit was an Anṣārī and not from Quraysh). (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 3506)

## 1.2 Research Objectives

There are four main objectives of this study which are:

- i. To evaluate the Arabic language competency of IRK students who took the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course during their first semester at CFS, IIUM.
- ii. To investigate IRK students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and value of the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course.
- iii. To assess the impact of the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course on students' comprehension of their core IRK courses.
- iv. To determine the significance of enrolling in the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course for improving IRK students' overall academic achievements.

## 1.3 Research Questions

This research embarks on the research questions:

- i. How does the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course affect the Arabic language competency of IRK students at CFS IIUM?
- ii. What are the perceptions of IRK students regarding the effectiveness and value of the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course?
- iii. In what ways does the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course enhance students' comprehension of their core IRK courses?
- iv. What is the perceived significance of the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course in improving the overall academic achievements of IRK students?

## 2. Literature Review

Arabic, a language of great historical, religious, and cultural significance, presents unique challenges and opportunities for learners. Al-Naḥw (syntax) and Al-Ṣarf (morphology) are among the core foundational elements in mastering Arabic. The importance of Al-Naḥw and Al-Ṣarf in assisting comprehension, fluency, and linguistic accuracy in Arabic courses are somehow often discussed.

Al-Naḥw, the study of Arabic syntax, is crucial for constructing grammatically correct sentences. Its importance is emphasised in various scholarly works. According to Owens (1988), Al-Naḥw provides the structural rules necessary for forming coherent and meaningful sentences. Without a solid understanding of Al-Naḥw, learners might struggle to grasp the relationships between words and phrases. As Abboud and McCarus (1983) suggest, a strong grasp of Al-Naḥw allows learners to decode complex sentences, leading to better reading comprehension. The ability to parse sentences accurately is essential for understanding classical texts and modern literature. For students of advanced Arabic studies, particularly in fields like theology and classical literature, Al-Naḥw is absolutely necessary. Versteegh (1997) notes that advanced learners must navigate complex syntactic structures to interpret religious and historical texts accurately.

Al-Ṣarf on another hand focuses on the structure and patterning of words, covering aspects like root letters, verb conjugations, and noun formations. Its significance is seen as the mastery of vocabulary building as Holes (2004) explains, Al-Ṣarf helps learners understand word roots

and patterns, making it easier to deduce the meanings of new words. This morphological awareness significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition. In another literature, Badawi, Carter, and Gully (2004) assert that Al-Şarf is essential for correct verb conjugation and noun declension. Mastery of Al-Şarf ensures that learners can express themselves accurately in both written and spoken Arabic. According to Ryding (2005), Al-Şarf is crucial for understanding derived forms of words. This knowledge enables learners to recognise and use a wide range of related words, enriching their vocabulary as well as language proficiency.

The paper "Students' Perception Toward Nahw Learning at State Islamic College" by Kamaluddin investigates the perceptions of students regarding their experiences with Nahw (Arabic grammar) learning. The study employs a qualitative approach, gathering data through surveys and interviews to understand how students view the effectiveness of their Nahw education.

Besides, another paper "Talīm al-Qawāid an-Nahwiyyah Bi at-Tarīqah al-Istiqrāiyah" by Syahril and Afriati explores the effectiveness of the Istiqraiyyah method in teaching Arabic grammar (Nahw) at an Islamic educational institution. The study employs a classroom action research approach to assess how this method impacts students' understanding and application of Nahw rules. Syahril and Afriati's study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Istiqraiyyah method in teaching Nahw, highlighting its potential to enhance student engagement and proficiency.

Thus, it is proven that Al-Nahw and Al-Şarf are vital components of Arabic language education, crucial for achieving linguistic competence, fluency, excellent comprehension, accurate expression, and as a good access to Arabic advanced studies. Hence, it is significant to proceed with the current study of "Enhancing Academic Excellence: A Case Study on Arabic Proficiency Levels among the IRK Students and their Perceptions on Studying Al-Nahw wa Al-Şarf in CFS IIUM", in the acquisition of proper improvement of the course content, pedagogical as well as students' preparedness.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Population and sample**

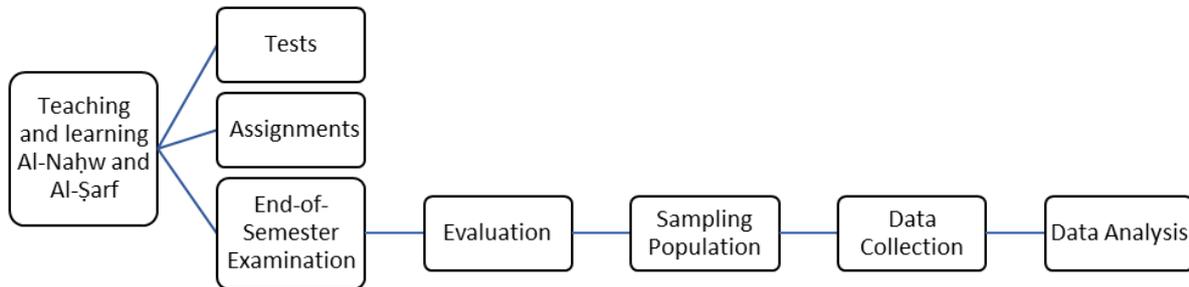
This study employed a quantitative and survey research design, specifically utilising a survey research method to evaluate the Arabic language competency of IRK students who enrolled in the Al-Nahw wa Al-Şarf course during their first semester at CFS IIUM. The primary objective was to gather empirical data on students' perceptions of the course and its impact on their academic performance and language proficiency.

The study targeted all IRK students at CFS IIUM Gambang Campus, who took the Al-Nahw wa Al-Şarf course in their first semester of the 2023 academic year. Purposive sampling technique was used and a sample of 240 students was chosen from the whole population which consist of 93 male and 147 female students. This population was chosen due to their direct experience with the course, ensuring relevant and firsthand feedback. The chosen sample was then evaluated using a set of questionnaires.

#### **3.2 Data collection method**

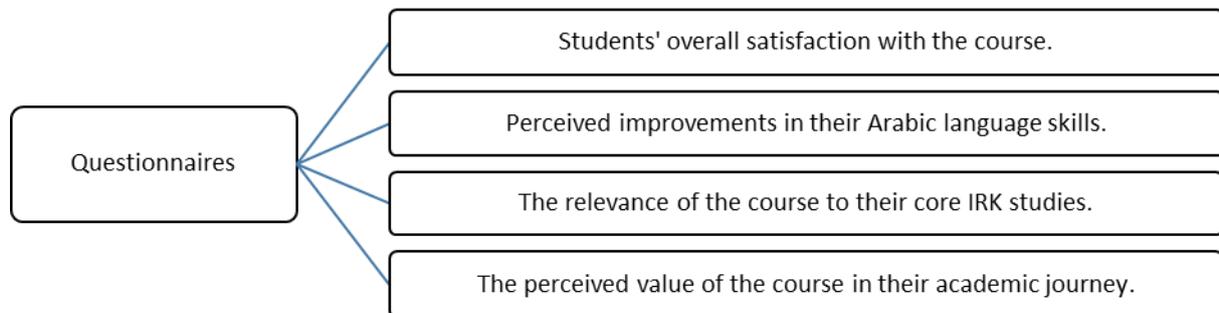
A set of questionnaires has been distributed to the IRK students. 13 structured questions, including ones about demographics, are spread throughout two sections of the survey. Section A contains the respondent's demographics. And Section B contains the students' perceptions

and experiences of learning Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf course. The research framework, which involves a sampling population, data collection, and data analysis, is depicted in Figure 1 from the teaching and learning phase to the evaluation phase.



**Figure 1: Research Framework**

A survey questionnaire titled "IRK Students' Perception on Studying Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf Course" was developed for data collection. The questionnaire was designed to assess several key areas as follows:



**Figure 2: Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of closed ended questions to allow for quantitative analysis. The instrument used is a modification of instrument developed by Hamidah Mat & Wan Mohammad Ubaidillah Wan Abas. (2016). The survey was administered using Google Forms, providing a user-friendly and accessible platform for students to respond. The items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale which is from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). The survey was distributed electronically to all 312 eligible IRK students via their university email addresses. Students were given a three-week period to complete the survey, with reminder emails sent at one-week intervals to ensure a high response rate. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The participants of this study included 312 first- and second-year IRK students at CFS IIUM Gombang Campus. They completed the survey from April, 29 until May 3, 2024. Based on the analysis, the Cronbach's alpha value for the level of reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable with the value of 0.736 and it is presented in Table 1. Out of the 312 students, 240 completed the survey questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of approximately 77.6%.

**Table 1: Result analysis of survey studies**

Description	Values	Internal Consistency
Number of questions	8	Acceptable
Sum of the item variance	3.94	
Variance of the total score	11.07	
Cronbach's alpha	0.736	

#### 4. Data analysis

To ensure the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, a pilot test was conducted with a small sample of IRK students who had previously completed the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf course. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine the questionnaire for clarity and relevance. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the survey items, with a threshold of 0.7 or higher considered acceptable. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the IIUM Research Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study, with no personally identifiable information collected. The data were used solely for research purposes and were kept securely.

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were reported using descriptive statistical analysis, which included percentages, means, and standard deviations. This study also analysed the relationship between students' perceptions of the Al-Naḥw wa Al-Şarf course and Arabic proficiency, as well as their academic excellence. The mean of the data is analysed using descriptive statistical analysis as given as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
0	0	0	0	1	3	1	2
1	1	0	1	1	30	8	2
5	18	14	1	7	92	23	42
62	102	100	70	83	77	112	140
174	120	128	170	149	40	98	55
242	242	242	242	242	242	242	242
0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.41
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.41	1.24	0.41	0.83
0.41	0.41	0.00	0.41	0.41	12.40	3.31	0.83
2.07	7.44	5.79	0.41	2.89	38.02	9.50	17.36
25.62	42.15	41.32	28.93	34.30	31.82	46.28	57.85
71.90	49.59	52.89	70.25	61.57	16.53	40.50	22.73
<b>4.69</b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>4.69</b>	<b>4.55</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>4.00</b>

Mean score	Interpretation
1.00-2.33	Low level
2.33-3.67	Medium
3.68-5.00	High

The methodology adopted in this study provided a proper framework for evaluating the impact and relevance of the *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* course on IRK students. The high response rate and comprehensive demographic data allowed for an in-depth analysis of various factors influencing students' perceptions and academic outcomes. The findings contribute valuable insights into the role of this course in enhancing Arabic language proficiency and supporting the academic success of IRK students at CFS IIUM.

## 5. Discussion and Results

The primary goal of the study is to assess the Arabic language proficiency of IRK students who enrolled in *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* course during their first semester of the academic year and the significance of taking the course in relation to enhancing their academic performance, as stated before.

Additionally, the goal of the research was to analyse the questionnaire responses provided by IRK students. Table 3 displays the demographic information of the respondents, including gender, academic year, Arabic class level at CFS, previous secondary school background, and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results in Bahasa Arab Tinggi or any equivalent subjects.

**Table 3: Students Demographic**

Item	Subject	No	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	93	38.8
	Female	147	61.3
Year	1st	226	95.8
	2nd	10	4.2
Arabic Course Level	Level 4	202	83.5
	Level 3	8	3.3
	Level 2	32	13.2
Background of Secondary School	Religious Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah Agama)	132	54.8
	National Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan)	38	15.8
	Tahfiz Institutions	31	12.9
	Private Secondary School (Sekolah Menengah Swasta)	22	9.1
	Residential School (Sekolah Berasrama Penuh)	16	6.6
	MARA Junior Science College (Maktab Rendah Sains MARA)	2	0.8
Bahasa Arab Tinggi or any equivalent subjects' scores in SPM	A+	41	17.7
	A	72	31.2
	A-	62	26.8
	B+	44	19
	B	10	4.3
	C+	2	0.9

In order to determine the significance and applicability of *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* course to the IRK programme at CFS IIUM, 312 first- and second-year students participated in a survey. However, just 242 students answered the questionnaires. In essence, there are 147 respondents (61.3%) who are female and 93 (38.8%) who are male. Of the 242 respondents in total, 95.8 percent are first-year students, and 4.2% are second-year students. Regarding the Arabic course level at CFS, 202 participants, or 83.5% of the total, are at level 4, 8 students, or 3.3 percent of the respondents, are at level 3, and 13.2%, or 32 respondents, are at level 2.

Accordingly, the following student populations make up the student body: 54.8%, or 132 students, attend religious secondary schools (Sekolah Menengah Agama); 15.8%, or 38 students, attend national secondary schools (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan); 12.9%, or 31 students, attend tahfiz institutions; 9.1%, or 22 students, attend private secondary schools (Sekolah Menengah Swasta); 6.6%, or 16 students, attend residential schools (Sekolah Berasrama Penuh); and 0.8%, or 2 students, attend MARA Junior Science College (Maktab Rendah Sains MARA).

With respect to their Bahasa Arab Tinggi or any equivalent subjects' scores in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results, 17.7% or 41 students obtained A+, 31.2% or 72 students obtained A, 26.8% or 62 students obtained A-, 19% or 44 students obtained B+, 4.3% or 10 students obtained B, and 0.9% or 2 students obtained C+.

**Table 4: Students' perceptions on studying *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* course**

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
In the IRK foundation programme, proficiency in Arabic is essential.	-	0.4	2.1	25.6	71.9
My understanding of IRK subjects is improved by learning <i>Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf</i> course.	-	0.4	7.5	42.3	49.8
The syllabus of <i>Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf</i> course meets the requirements of IRK students in CFS IIUM for Arabic language proficiency.	-	-	5.8	41.3	52.9
A strong knowledge of Arabic is necessary for the study of IRK core courses.	-	-	0.4	28.9	70.2
Knowledge of <i>Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf</i> is an added value for IRK students.	-	0.4	2.9	34.4	61.8
It is difficult to find references for Islamic studies in languages other than Arabic.	1.2	12.4	38	31.8	16.5
Do you think students' lack of Arabic language proficiency affects the process of learning?		3.3	9.5	46.3	40.5
Please rate your satisfaction level with your current academic performance.	0.8	0.8	17.4	58.1	22.8

The study reveals that 71.9% of respondents strongly agree that proficiency in Arabic is essential for pursuing studies in the IRK foundation programme, while 25.6% agree, 2.1% would rather remain neutral, and only 0.4% disagree. Given that Arabic is regarded as an auxiliary science, this demonstrates why proficiency in Arabic is necessary in order to understand Islamic studies.

Following that, 49.8% of the respondents strongly agree that students' understanding of IRK subjects is improved by learning *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* course. Conversely, of the remaining respondents, 42.3% agree, 7.5% would neither agree nor disagree, and only 0.4% disagree.

Regarding the syllabus of *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* offered by the Department of Human Sciences under the AIS module, 52.9% of the respondents strongly agree that the course meets the requirements for the IRK students at the foundation level, while 41.3% agree, and only 5.8% would rather remain neutral.

Additionally, a staggering 70.2% of respondents strongly agree that studying IRK core courses requires a solid command of Arabic, followed by 28.9% who agree and 0.4% who would neither agree nor disagree. This perspective demonstrates that knowledge of Arabic is required in order to deduce contemporary needs-based solutions from the Shari'ah, as *Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf* are primarily used to comprehend the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

This survey further demonstrates the significance of learning Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf can bring value to IRK students, as 61.8% of respondents strongly agree with the statement, followed by 34.4% who agree, compared to 2.9% who would prefer to remain neutral, and only 0.4% who disagree. The general examination system for education in Malaysia places a strong focus on writing. As a result, students should be extremely knowledgeable and experienced, particularly when it comes to developing writing strategies (Muhammad Azhar Zailani et. al., 2015). For this reason, it is obvious that IRK students stand to benefit greatly from studying Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf because this course is essential to strengthening Arabic writing skills.

On the other hand, 16.5% of respondents strongly agreed, followed by 31.8% who agreed, 38% who would prefer to remain neutral, 12.4% who disagreed, and just 1.2% who strongly disagreed when asked if it is difficult to find references for Islamic Studies in languages other than Arabic. This is most likely due to the fact that many references on Islamic studies have been translated into other languages, especially English.

In addition, in evaluating the respondents' perceptions on whether students' lack of Arabic language proficiency could affect the process of learning in the IRK programme, 40.5% strongly agreed, followed by 46.3% who agreed, 9.5% who would prefer to remain neutral, and only 3.3% who disagreed.

When asked how satisfied they were with their present academic performance, IRK students gave the following answers: 22.8% were strongly satisfied, followed by 58.1% who were satisfied, 17.4% who said they would prefer to stay neutral, 0.8% who were unsatisfied, and only 0.8% who were strongly unsatisfied.

## 6. Conclusions

In conclusion, Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf should be considered a mandatory subject for IRK students. Proficiency in Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf enhances comprehension, grammatical accuracy, linguistic competence, and fluency, which are essential qualities for future Muslim scholars. Integrating Al-Naḥw wa Al-Ṣarf using diverse pedagogical methods can address learning challenges and enhance engagement. Ongoing research and innovative teaching strategies will further improve Arabic courses, fostering excellence among IRK students at CFS IIUM Gambang Campus.

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