

Arabic Phonological Errors in Reading and Their Implications for Meaning

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Abstract This study analyzes phonological errors made by students at an Islamic junior high school in Karawang when reading Arabic texts and investigates their implications for meaning. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research uses reading tests, interviews, and observation to collect data from one teacher and five students. The findings reveal three main types of phonological errors: substitution, addition, and omission. These errors are significantly influenced by internal factors, such as diverse educational backgrounds, limited articulation skills, lack of independent practice, and low self-confidence. External factors also play a crucial role, including the influence of the students' native languages (Sundanese and Indonesian), conventional teaching methods, limited use of audio-visual media, and a lack of supportive learning environments outside of school. The study demonstrates that these phonological mistakes directly affect the lexical meaning of words, often resulting in altered or lost meaning, which can impair reading comprehension. The research concludes that while teachers have implemented strategies like talaqqi and direct correction, these efforts need to be complemented with systematic phonological evaluations and the integration of audio-visual media to achieve optimal learning outcomes in Arabic pronunciation.	Keywords error analysis; phonological errors; Arabic language; meaning and comprehension; case study
Abstrak <i>Penelitian ini menganalisis kesalahan fonologi yang dilakukan siswa di sebuah SMP Islam di Karawang saat membaca teks berbahasa Arab dan mengkaji implikasinya terhadap makna. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini menggunakan tes membaca, wawancara, dan observasi untuk mengumpulkan data dari satu guru dan lima siswa. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan tiga jenis utama kesalahan fonologi: perubahan bunyi, penambahan bunyi, dan penghilangan bunyi. Kesalahan ini secara signifikan dipengaruhi oleh faktor internal, seperti latar belakang pendidikan yang beragam, keterbatasan kemampuan artikulasi, kurangnya latihan mandiri, dan rendahnya kepercayaan diri. Faktor eksternal juga berperan penting, termasuk pengaruh bahasa ibu siswa (Sunda dan Indonesia), metode pengajaran konvensional, terbatasnya penggunaan media audio-visual, dan kurang mendukungnya lingkungan belajar di luar sekolah. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan fonologi tersebut secara langsung memengaruhi makna leksikal kata, sering kali mengakibatkan</i>	Kata Kunci <i>analisis kesalahan; kesalahan fonologi; bahasa Arab; makna dan pemahaman; studi kasus</i>

<i>makna berubah atau hilang, yang dapat mengganggu pemahaman bacaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun guru telah menerapkan strategi seperti talaqqi dan koreksi langsung, upaya tersebut masih perlu dilengkapi dengan evaluasi fonologi yang sistematis dan integrasi media audio-visual untuk mencapai hasil belajar pelafalan bahasa Arab yang optimal.</i>	
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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Arabic stands as one of the world's languages with a complex phonological system, in which each phoneme functions to distinguish meaning and secure communicative precision. An error in pronouncing a particular sound does not only cause a shift in meaning; it can also produce a significant change in meaning altogether. Phonological mastery, then, forms a fundamental aspect of Arabic language learning. Amrulloh and Hasanah (2019) stress that accurate pronunciation of the hijaiyah letters stands as the primary key to understanding Arabic-language texts correctly.

Within formal education, particularly at Islamic junior secondary schools, Arabic language learning forms an important part of the curriculum. In practice, however, students often make phonological errors, both in speaking and in reading Arabic texts. These errors can take the form of substitution, omission, or addition of sound (Rahmatia, 2021). This condition carries a direct implication for text-meaning comprehension and affects the effectiveness of students' communication in Arabic. Based on the researchers' initial observation, for example, a recurring phenomenon emerged in which students pronounced the letter ha (هـ) as ha (حـ) when reading a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, a substitution that risks altering the text's meaning.

Phonological study within Arabic language learning has drawn substantial research attention, in the form of both theses and journal articles. Al Hakim (2023) examines the phonological errors of Grade VII students at MTs Negeri Batang, focusing on error forms and their causal factors. Amrulloh and Hasanah (2019) examine the phonological errors of madrasah students in South Lampung, aiming to identify and minimize pronunciation errors. Hidayah and Ulya (2021) examine the phonological errors of students at Pondok Pesantren Darul Muttaqin, Jombang, in the skill of reading Arabic texts. Saidah and Tawakkal (2022) highlight the implications of Arabic language errors for meaning, and Muballighin and Sriana (2024) examine phonological errors among female students in the context of reading Arabic texts. These studies, however, focus mainly on error forms and their causal factors, while discussion of phonological errors' implications for meaning remains relatively under-examined in depth.

Based on this research gap, the present study focuses on analyzing the phonological errors of students at an Islamic junior secondary school in Karawang and their implications for meaning. This study uses a case study method to uncover the forms of phonological error that occur and how these errors affect comprehension of Arabic-text meaning. The study, accordingly, aims to contribute to Arabic linguistic scholarship, particularly in the field of phonology, while offering practical benefit for teachers and Arabic language learners in improving their skill in reading and pronouncing Arabic texts according to correct rules.

Identification of Problems

Three problems follow from this background. First, students at the Islamic junior secondary school studied here show recurring phonological errors, substitution, addition, and omission, when reading Arabic texts, errors that risk altering or erasing the intended meaning of what they read. Second, prior research on Arabic phonological error has focused mainly on documenting error forms and their causal factors, while the connection between specific phonological errors and specific changes in lexical meaning remains comparatively under-examined. Third, teachers already apply strategies such as *talaqqi* and direct correction, but the extent to which these strategies address the meaning-level consequences of phonological error, not just the pronunciation error itself, remains unclear. These problems point to a gap between the phonological precision Arabic reading comprehension requires (*das sollen*) and the substitution, addition, and omission errors that persist in classroom reading practice (*das sein*).

Formulation of the Problem

Based on this background, the research problems are formulated as follows: first, what forms of phonological error do students make when reading Arabic texts; second, what internal and external factors cause these phonological errors; and third, how do these phonological errors affect the lexical meaning of the words and texts students read.

Objectives and Benefits of Research

Research Objectives

This study aims to identify the forms of phonological error students make when reading Arabic texts, to analyze the internal and external factors causing these errors, and to examine their implications for the lexical meaning of the texts read.

Research Benefits

Theoretically, this study contributes to Arabic linguistic scholarship, particularly in the field of phonology, by connecting specific error forms to their specific consequences for lexical meaning, an angle prior research has examined less directly. Practically, the findings can guide Arabic language teachers in designing more targeted phonological instruction and evaluation, helping students improve their skill in reading and pronouncing Arabic texts according to correct rules.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework

Language error stands as a normal occurrence in language learning. Learners commonly make many language errors, particularly when learning a foreign or second language, since a foreign language is naturally learned only after a person has mastered their mother tongue. According to Corder (1981), language error takes two forms: error, which relates to systematic or consistent language deviation, and mistake, which relates to unintentional deviation. Error stems from a competence factor, meaning the learner has not yet understood or mastered the target language system in use. Mistake, by contrast, stems from a performance factor, such as insufficient concentration, fatigue, haste, or careless work.

Within the language-learning process, error is unavoidable, including in learning a foreign language such as Arabic. Language error counts as a normal occurrence, particularly for learners newly encountering a language. This error generally occurs through deviation from language rules, whether in spoken or written form, consistent with Tarigan and Djago's (2011) view that error marks a flaw in the speech or writing of someone learning a language. Arabic carries a unique sound system, distinct from other languages, with a level of complexity that varies. Language specialists agree that the various sound variations within this language fall under the branch of linguistics known as phonology.

Kridalaksana (2008) defines phonology as the field within linguistics that investigates the sounds of language according to their function. The branch of linguistics that studies, analyzes, and discusses the sequence of language sounds is called phonology, a term that etymologically derives from phone (sound) and logos (science). According to Chaer (2014), the hierarchy of sound units that form phonology's object of study divides into phonetics and phonemics. Phonetics, broadly, is described as the branch of phonological study that examines language sounds without regard to whether those sounds function to distinguish meaning. Phonemics, by contrast, is the branch of phonological study that examines language sounds while attending to their function in distinguishing meaning. Based on these expert views, phonology can be concluded to be the branch of linguistics that focuses on the study of language sounds; the discipline does not only identify and analyze sound but also works to understand its role in communication.

Setyawati (2010) states that language error in the phonological aspect can be divided into three types: alteration, omission, and addition of phonemes. Elyhawiyati (in Rahmatia, 2021) divides phonological error into four types: pronunciation error, omission error, reversal error during reading, and insertion or addition error. Based on these views, phonological error in language use can be categorized into several types based on the change that occurs to a phoneme. Broadly, this error covers alteration, addition, and omission of phonemes, as several scholars note. Phonological error can also take the form of pronunciation error, phoneme reversal during reading, and insertion of an inappropriate sound. These varied error types show that the phonological aspect plays an important role in a language's clarity of meaning, so a deeper understanding of phonological error can help raise the effectiveness of language instruction.

Conceptual Framework

Based on this theoretical foundation, the conceptual framework of this study positions students' Arabic phonological errors as shaped by the interaction of internal factors, educational background, articulation ability, independent practice, and psychological confidence, and external factors, mother-tongue influence, teaching method, instructional media, and the surrounding learning environment. These factors produce three observable error types, substitution, addition, and omission, at the level of individual phonemes and word forms. Because Arabic operates as a phonologically precise language, in which a single phoneme change can shift or erase lexical meaning, this framework treats each error form as carrying a direct semantic consequence, not merely a pronunciation flaw. The framework, then, links error form, causal factor, and meaning implication into a single analytical chain: identifying an error's form and cause is necessary but not sufficient without also tracing its specific effect on the meaning of the word or text in which it occurs.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach and a case study research method. The case study method was chosen because the researchers aimed to explore a particular phenomenon (case) within a specific time and activity, and to gather detailed, in-depth information through various data-collection procedures over a defined period. The participants in this study consisted of one teacher and 5 students. Participants were determined through purposive sampling, selected based on specific considerations and objectives (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis in this study adopted the Miles and Huberman analysis model. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative data-analysis activity runs interactively and continuously until the data reach saturation. This model consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

The first stage is data reduction. At this stage, the researchers summarized data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation across 14 days of research. This reduction process helped the researchers identify themes, patterns, and a clearer picture of students' phonological errors when reading Arabic texts at the Islamic junior secondary school studied.

The second stage is data display. The reduced data were then organized systematically in narrative, tabular, and diagrammatic form. At this stage, the researchers grouped the data by category relevant to the research focus, such as interview results, observation notes, and documentation. This data display aimed to ease the analysis process and to answer the study's research questions.

The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, the researchers examined the displayed data in depth to draw conclusions regarding the forms of students' phonological error, their causal factors, and the teacher's efforts to address them. The conclusions reached were then verified through triangulation of data from observation, interviews, and documentation, so the research findings could be scientifically accounted for.

Through this sequence of stages, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of students' phonological errors in reading Arabic texts, along with the teacher's strategies for addressing them.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION ANALYSIS

Forms of Arabic Phonological Error

Based on interview and observation results, this study used a read-aloud test instrument to identify the phonological errors of students at the Islamic junior secondary school in Karawang. Across the five student samples selected, varied articulation errors emerged as they read Arabic texts. In-depth analysis of this data shows that differences between the Arabic and Indonesian phonological systems often stand as the primary trigger for the shifts and errors that appear in pronunciation. Two Arabic texts, drawn from the textbook *Al-'Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik*, served as the reading material; the following findings explore the most common error forms identified and analyze their implications.

Sound Substitution

The most frequently identified error form was sound substitution. This error occurred when a student replaced one phoneme with another phoneme that carries a different articulation point or manner, most often because the substituted phoneme does not exist in the Indonesian sound system. A clear example appears in the word *al-haram*, read by several students as *al-haram* (with the Arabic letter *ha* ح shifting toward *ha* ه), so the word was read as *al-haram* (الَهْرَام). This change reflects weak mastery of the *makhraj* (articulation point) of letters that Indonesian does not have. A similar error appeared in the word *as-salah* (الصَّلَاة), read as *as-salah* or even *la-s-salah*, which shows that students have not yet learned to identify word structure and the features of vowel length and geminated consonants in Arabic. In the word *al-'asr* (العَصْر), a shift to *al-asr* or *al-ashr* appeared, showing that the phonemes 'ain (ع) and *sad* (ص) often go unheard or get replaced. This phenomenon also occurred in the word *al-'isha* (العِشَاء), pronounced *al-isha* (الإِشَاء), along with several place names and other terms. Arabic carries letters unfamiliar to the Indonesian phonological system. According to al-Khalil bin Ahmad (in Kurnaedi, 2018), these letters carry highly specific articulation points, such as the back of the throat, the palate, and the nasal cavity, so it comes as no surprise that students unaccustomed to these sounds find them difficult to pronounce.

Sound Addition

Sound addition (*adisi*) appeared in the form of an inserted phoneme absent from a word's original form. An example appears in the pronunciation of *sayusalli* (سَيُصَلِّي), read as *suyasallu*, with an added vowel /u/ at the end of the word. This addition not only changes the word's phonological structure but also risks affecting its meaning. Vowel addition at the end of a word also appeared in the pronunciation of the name *Maryam* (مَرْيَمُ), read as *Marayamu*. This shows students' tendency to adjust Arabic word pronunciation to the sound pattern common in their mother tongue, Indonesian, which generally does not end a word with a consonant cluster (*sukun*).

Sound Omission

Sound omission (omisif) also occurred, when a student failed to pronounce a phoneme that should appear in a word. In the word as-salah (الصَّلَاة), for example, some students omitted the phoneme /l/, so the word was read as salah. The same occurred in the words al-madinah and al-fajr, where the definite article al- (ال) went unheard entirely. Phonemes generally considered difficult, such as 'ain (ع), kha (خ), and sad (ص), were also often mispronounced or not pronounced at all, as in the word al-mukhtabar (المُخْتَبَر), read as al-muhtabar. This error type shows students' tendency to skip or their inability to pronounce sounds they consider difficult because these sounds do not appear in their daily language use.

These three error forms can be understood as part of the second-language acquisition process, in which students face obstacles absorbing the Arabic sound system fully. This is reinforced by Brown's (2008) view that phonological error in second-language learning can emerge from cross-language transfer, learning conditions, or the communication strategies a learner uses. Beyond this, internal factors such as students' psychological and physiological condition, and external factors such as the learning environment and the teaching method a teacher uses, also shape the quality of students' pronunciation (Sama' et al., 2021).

Students' phonological errors when reading Arabic texts show a limitation in mastering the Arabic sound system. These errors do not stem solely from insufficient phoneme knowledge; they also relate to mother-tongue influence, articulation limitations, learning conditions, and students' understanding of word meaning. Phonological instruction, then, needs to run more systematically and continuously, with emphasis on makhraj practice, so students' reading ability improves in terms of articulation accuracy.

Factors Causing Students' Phonological Errors

Based on interviews with the Arabic language teacher and five students, reinforced by direct classroom observation findings, the researchers identified various factors contributing to phonological error in Arabic pronunciation. These causal factors broadly fall into two categories: internal and external factors.

Internal factors are conditions originating from within the student. One key finding concerns uneven educational background. Some students coming from general elementary schools lacked initial grounding in pronouncing the hijaiyah letters, a pattern consistent with interlanguage error theory (Corder, 1981), in which error occurs because a student remains at the stage of building a not-yet-stable second-language system. Varying articulation ability also stood as a factor: several students reported difficulty pronouncing particular letters, such as the phoneme /r/, or distinguishing the sounds /q/ from /k/ and /h/ (ح) from /h/ (ه). This physiological condition forms part of the internal-physiological factors shaping language acquisition (Sama' et al., 2021).

Further findings show that insufficient independent practice contributes to error. Most students rarely practiced outside class, reflecting a passive learning strategy, which supports Brown's (2008) view that error can occur through suboptimal communication strategy. Psychological aspects, such as low interest and low self-confidence, were also found to affect learning outcomes. Students who felt embarrassed or lacked confidence

tended to show low motivation, which made it difficult for them to correct their pronunciation errors (Sama' et al., 2021).

External factors originate outside the student and cover environment and teaching method. Mother-tongue influence stood as a dominant factor, in which the majority of Sundanese-background students tended to replace Arabic phonemes with sounds familiar in their mother tongue. This is consistent with interlingual transfer theory (Brown, 2008), in which differences in sound structure between the mother tongue and the target language trigger pronunciation error.

Classical, group-based teaching strategy also contributed. Although the teacher used talaqqi and drilling methods, group repetition left students without personal guidance, consistent with Richards's (1971) view that error can arise from a method mismatched to student needs, particularly for oral skill. Finally, limited use of audio-visual support media and an unsupportive learning environment outside school also stood as obstacles. Without appropriate media and support from home, students struggled to obtain consistent phonetic input, which left the internalization of pronunciation less than optimal (Sama' et al., 2021).

Implications of Arabic Phonological Error for Meaning

In Arabic, the phoneme system carries highly strict characteristics. A change in a single sound can produce a strikingly different meaning, even a fairly serious misunderstanding. This forms the basis for this section's discussion: how the phonological error forms found in students' reading directly affect the meaning of the words or sentences they utter. This finding aligns with Nur et al.'s (2022) explanation that Arabic is a phonologically highly precise language, so a single small pronunciation error can damage the entire intended meaning.

Semantics stands as the branch of linguistics specifically devoted to studying meaning in language, at the level of word, phrase, or discourse (Ainin & Asrori, 2014). Within this study's scope, however, the researchers focused analysis on lexical meaning only, namely a word's basic meaning independent of a broader sentence context (Chaer, 2014). This choice was made because a phonological error's effect is more easily detected at the lexical level, and because this level carries more relevance for the early stage of Arabic language learning.

The following presents an analysis of the phonological error forms found in students' reading of the two Arabic texts and their implications for meaning, grouped by error type and illustrated with real examples from each student.

Table 2 sets out substitution errors identified in student reading, alongside their implications for meaning.

Table 2. Substitution Errors and Their Implications for Meaning

Original Word	Word Pronounced	Gloss	Implication for Meaning
الحرام	أهرام	sacred → no clear meaning	The meaning of the sacred place changes entirely

		(resembles "harm/decrepit")	
شَاءَ	سَاءَ	willed → meaningless	The meaning of the prayer and the declaration of faith is lost
الظُّهْرَ	الدُّهْرَ	the Dhuhr prayer → era/time	Shifts the meaning of an act of worship to a general meaning
العِشَاءَ	الإِشَاءَ	the Isha prayer → meaningless	Error in naming the prayer
الطِّبِّ	الطَّبِّ	medicine → meaningless	Obscures the field of study
سَيُصَلِّي	سَيُصَلُّو	he will pray (fi'il mudhari') → non-standard form	The meaning of the act of worship becomes unclear
المُحْتَبَرِ	المُهِتَرِ	laboratory → meaningless	Disrupts understanding of the educational context

Table 3 sets out addition errors identified in student reading, alongside their implications for meaning.

Table 3. Addition Errors and Their Implications for Meaning

Original Word	Word Pronounced	Gloss	Implication for Meaning
الْجُمُعَةَ	الْجُمُوعَةَ	Friday prayer → meaningless	Obscures the intent of worship
النَّبَوِيِّ	النَّبَاوِيَا	Nabawi (Prophetic) → non-standard	The name of a sacred place becomes ambiguous
جَامِعَةٍ	جَمِيعَةٍ	university → meaning "all"	An educational institution shifts to a different meaning
تَذْهَبُ	تَذْهَبُوا	singular subject → plural subject	Creates ambiguity about who performs the action
الصَّلَوَاتِ	الصَّلَاةِ / الصَّلَوَاتِ	standard plural → non-standard form	The text becomes non-standard and unclear
كُلِّيَّةٍ	كُلِّيَاةٍ	faculty → imprecise form	Obscures the intended field of study
سَيَذْهَبُ	سَيَذْهَبُوا	individual plan → group plan	Changes the meaning of who performs the action
سَلْمَانُ	سَلَمْنُو / سَلَامْنُو	Salman → non-standard form	Changes the identity of the figure named
دِمَشْقَ	دِمَعْسَقَ	Damascus → non-standard form	A major city's name becomes inaccurate
سُورِيَا	سُوَارِيَا / سُوِيرِيَا	Syria → mispronounced	Obscures the geographic location

Table 4 sets out omission errors identified in student reading, alongside their implications for meaning.

Table 4. Omission Errors and Their Implications for Meaning

Original Word	Word Pronounced	Gloss	Implication for Meaning
شَاءَ	سَاءَ	willed → meaningless	The meaning of the prayer and the declaration of faith is lost
الصَّلَاةِ	صَالَةً	the prayer → hall/auditorium	The correct word shifts into a different meaning
الْفَجْرَ	فَجْرَ	the dawn (definite) → a dawn (indefinite)	A change from the standpoint of clarity of meaning

Limitations

This study carries limitations characteristic of a small-sample case study. It draws on five students and one teacher at a single Islamic junior secondary school in Karawang, which limits how far the findings generalize to other schools with different student linguistic backgrounds or instructional conditions. The study also restricts meaning analysis to the lexical level, so it does not capture how these same phonological errors might affect meaning at the phrase, sentence, or discourse level. Finally, the study identifies error forms and causal factors through interview, observation, and reading-test data over a 14-day period, but it does not test the effectiveness of any specific remedial intervention, such as systematic phonological evaluation or audio-visual media integration, which the study recommends but does not itself evaluate.

Contribution

This study contributes a direct empirical link between specific Arabic phonological error forms, substitution, addition, and omission, and their specific consequences for lexical meaning, an angle prior Arabic phonological error research has typically examined separately from meaning implication. By pairing each identified error with both its likely causal factor and its concrete effect on word meaning within an authentic classroom reading context, this study offers Arabic language teachers a diagnostic reference that connects pronunciation correction directly to meaning preservation, rather than treating phonological accuracy and comprehension as separate instructional concerns.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on this study, it can be concluded that the phonological errors of students at the Islamic junior secondary school in Karawang fall into three forms: sound substitution, sound addition, and sound omission. These errors carry implications for changes in the meaning of Arabic texts. Based on the results of interviews, observation, and analysis of students' reading of Arabic texts, students' phonological errors are shaped substantially by internal factors, such as varied educational background, limited articulation ability, insufficient independent practice, and low student interest and confidence. External factors also play a role, including mother-tongue influence (Sundanese and Indonesian), still-classical teaching strategy, limited use of audio-visual media, and an unsupportive

learning environment outside school. These phonological errors directly affect the change or loss of word meaning, which can then affect comprehension of the text read.

Suggestions

For teachers, this study suggests complementing existing strategies, talaqqi, taqlin, direct correction with educative feedback, intensive reading drilling, random student selection for reading practice, image-based media, and dedicated reading time, with systematic phonological evaluation and audio-visual media integration, to help students internalize correct makhraj more consistently.

For schools and Arabic language education programs, this study suggests providing structured makhraj training and technical pronunciation guidance as a standing part of Arabic instruction, rather than addressing pronunciation error only as it arises during classroom reading.

For future researchers, this study suggests extending this analysis beyond the lexical level to examine how phonological error affects meaning at the phrase, sentence, and discourse level, and testing the effectiveness of systematic phonological evaluation and audio-visual media interventions across a larger, more varied student sample.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Muhammad Ramadhan conceived the research idea, conducted the data collection and phonological analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Mulhendra contributed to the theoretical framework and verified the linguistic analysis. Budianto supervised the research process and revised the manuscript. All authors approved the final manuscript for publication.

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