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INTERVENTION MODELS IN ARABIC VOCABULARY PROFICIENCY IN THE j-QAF PROGRAM AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract

Arabic acquisition is the main element that has to be mastered by pupils in order to attain proficiency in the Arabic Language. A total of 600 words should be mastered in the j-QAF program. Nevertheless, mistakes in the vocabulary and spelling often occur. This research is to measure the proficiency level of the pupils in Arabic vocabulary enrichment acquired through the j-QAF program in spelling, understanding the meanings of the words and usage in sentences. This research involved case study method employing library study and survey. This study introduced the vocabulary enrichment teaching intervention model which has been proved effective in the Arabic language vocabulary enrichment. An

Arabic vocabulary enrichment test covering the three aspects was administered to 120 primary 3 pupils in the district of Klang, Selangor. A total of 360 answer scripts were received and analysed. In addition, a set of questionnaires for pupils and Arabic teachers were also distributed to further strengthen the data. The study shows that the percentage of mastery were improving and has a significant impact on the learning of the Arabic language. Innovation in teaching of Arabic language and religious studies especially Quran and Hadith were also related to this study.

Keywords: Proficiency, vocabulary, language skills, j-QAF.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on vocabulary are growing rapidly (Schmitt, 2007) as knowledge of it is an important part of mastering a second or foreign language (Schmitt, 2008; Davoudi & Yousefi, 2016). Arabic, which is categorized as a second or foreign language taught at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the education system in Malaysia (Yahya et al., 2016; Hamza et al., 2015) should focus on vocabulary mastery in a continuous and consistent manner. This is stressed by Mahmud Kamil (1985) who states that PdP vocabulary is a continuous and consistent process for mastering a second or a foreign language. In addition, the field of linguistics that needs to be studied in the Arabic language (AL) should include morphology or the science of word formation in addition to syntax (grammar). The study of word formation in AL is known as *sarf* such as the method of *tasrif al-fi'il* i.e., three, four, five and six letters (Tammam Hassan, 1985; Muhammad Qadur, 1999).

There are elements of language in the field of the AL morphology that need to be acquired and mastered in a holistic and integrated manner by its students. According to Al-Fauzan et al. (2005), learning Arabic as a second language requires the elements of the language to be taught in an organized and orderly manner based on the ranking, namely knowledge of phonetics (*saut*), vocabulary (*mufradat*), and syntax (*al-tarkib*). This is in addition to emphasizing aspects of language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As confirmed by scholars of language and educational psychology vocabulary learning is a major requirement in the acquisition of a second language (Ahmad Tu'aimah, 1989).

This is important for acquiring basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing as they are dependent on good and structured vocabulary. Mujawir (2000) states that schools and teachers are responsible for improving the vocabulary of students, and mastering language vocabulary should be grounded in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. This is because vocabulary mastery is one of the indicators of proficiency in those skills. Hamza et al. (2015) and Khatijah Md Khatib and Zainal (2018) agree that the inability to master the vocabulary of the target

language may affect the four language skills.

This study focuses on the specific objectives of primary school Arabic from the aspect of writing skills contained in the AL j-QAF syllabus, which is to understand and write letters, sentences and verses using the correct writing method and in being able to construct and understand simple sentences based on various situations (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2006a). However, issues faced in mastering Arabic vocabulary include the inability of students to spell, pronounce and write Arabic words as well as teachers who are less skilled in teaching it at the primary school level. Therefore, this study examines and explores the capability of students in mastering Arabic vocabulary taught in primary schools.

The ability to master the Arabic vocabulary that is meant is to identify whether students are able to spell and understand the meaning of Arabic words and to use them in sentences. According to Maskor et al. (2016) mastering a language is based on the ability to know a number of words, understand meanings and use them in the context of proper sentences. Shathifa and Farween (2015) also state that vocabulary mastery relates to the ability to determine the meaning of vocabulary and that using it in the right context of the target language may impact the four basic skills of the language. Second or foreign language proficiency is also related to the ability to employ the strategies needed to be able to communicate in another language (Regan & Bayley, 2009).

RESEARCH ISSUES

Based on the syllabus in the primary schools, AL teaching should focus on four basic language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills should also be mastered by students of all languages including AL beginning at primary school. In the effort to master the basic skills of the language, primary school students who study AL in the j-QAF program are given direct exposure and emphasis in learning some basic language elements. These include studying the sound system, Arabic grammar and vocabulary, being introduced to simple Arabic words of wisdom and parables, as well as meanings that contain noble values and good morals. In the context of vocabulary mastery, students in primary schools need to acquire as many as 600 Arabic words that have been arranged according to their ages and cognitive levels and related to the topics selected. The number of words will increase according to the physical and intellectual development of the student. This is a starting step for learning the Arabic language and religion as well as knowledge related to future needs (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2006b).

In examining the content of the AL syllabus, researchers stress on the importance of studying aspects of vocabulary mastery as it is a critical factor in learning a foreign

language in Malaysia. This is acknowledged by Arabic language scholars such as Ahmad Tu'aimah (1989) who note that although linguists differ in regard to determining the primary objectives in foreign language learning, they all agree that the vocabulary aspect is the main requirement in learning a second language and is a basic condition for language learning before the acquisition of other skills associated with that language.

Scholars such as Mahmud, Mustafa and Mukhtar (1985) explain that the main thing emphasized by those learning a foreign language is the use of the vocabulary used in that language. This is supported by the theory put forward by Chomsky (1979) that the acquisition of human language began with its use and was based on the understanding of social contexts, individual relationships and creativity. There are those who believe that they can master a language simply by using a dictionary for that language; nevertheless linguists emphasise that vocabulary is one of the elements among others in a language that needs to be learned and mastered. This is because language is alive (Ja'far, Kirimboi & Najib, 2012) and evolves according to the times (Amrulloh & Himmah, 2017) through relationships and interactions among humans in the form of either oral or written communication (Amalia, 2017; Al-Qasimi, 2011). In this regard, Fatahiyah et al. (2017) explain that many teachers neglect the teaching of vocabulary as they believe that it will be mastered by the students themselves and are concerned that students will err in sentence writing before they have acquired grammar proficiency. In reality, however, the reason why students are unable to learn AL is their inability to master the basics and main aspects of the vocabulary. According to them, in attempting to overcome this problem, language teachers, especially in Malaysia, should create an '*Arabiyyah*' learning environment in order to encourage students to speak AL in and outside the classroom. In addition, they suggest that teachers should teach vocabulary as a special subject in addition to implementing the two main aspects of language teaching, namely determining the selection of vocabulary to be taught and the use of correct and effective language teaching methods and techniques.

Based on the researcher's 16-year experience as a primary school teacher covering Arabic Communication (Pilot Arabic) to the introduction of Arabic subjects through the j-QAF program, it was found that students from primary one to primary six were still less proficient in learning AL. This was due to weakness in vocabulary especially in spelling, understanding the meaning of words, and the use of Arabic words in sentences. In all three aspects, students often made mistakes and errors while studying the Arabic subjects or during examinations conducted by the school.

This finding is based on the researcher's interview with AL teachers (j-QAF teacher) who mentioned the difficulty of primary school students in learning AL especially in

the area of Arabic vocabulary during Teaching and Learning Modules (T&L) sessions in the classrooms. The main source of the problem was that students were still not adequately familiar with the letters and often made mistakes in terms of pronunciation, the long-short *harakat* or vowel marks, and inaccurate intonation of Arabic words. This problem is also due to the lack of vocabulary learning aids as well as teachers not regularly speaking Arabic in and outside the classroom. Furthermore, the one-hour per week allotted to learning AL in primary schools is extremely limited.

It is obvious that the difficulty in mastering Arabic vocabulary begins at the primary school level as indicated by the research by Rahim @ Saleh (2009) on j-QAF pupils studying AL subjects in national schools. Among the problems he identified in learning Arabic vocabulary included the inability of students to master everyday words, the lack of a significant relationship between learning aids and student achievement, and that 50 percent of AL teachers were not proficient in the language's teaching methods.

A pilot test conducted on vocabulary by this researcher on 30 students at a national primary school, namely SK Bukit Kemuning Shah Alam, found that students were weak in and had difficulty understanding the meaning of Arabic words either in expression or sentence form. For example, many of the students who were given a picture with a word and asked to match it with the right Arabic word were unable to do so correctly. In addition, when given three non-sequential Arabic words many of the students were not able to re-order them properly. This is because they did not know the meaning of a word nor understood the context of the sentence as a whole. Of the 30 students in the pilot test, only 60 percent achieved a passing grade (A, B, C) while the remaining 40 percent received failed grades (D & E). This shows that students' performance in mastering the Arabic vocabulary is still only at the moderate and satisfactory level.

The above phenomena led the authors to study and objectively examine student learning through AL education at the primary school level based on mastering Arabic vocabulary especially in regard to spelling, knowledge of meaning, and the use of Arabic words. The question is whether the vocabulary used in these three aspects has been really well-mastered and what aspects of it was mastered in three years of primary school.

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to a means of research from information that is obtained based on the planning by researchers seeking to generate accurate or almost accurate data in order to produce quality findings (Ahmad Munawar & Mohd Nor Shahizan, 2018). This research involved a field study using the case study method employing

library study, survey and data analysis. The library study was conducted by collecting data from various sources related to theories on the study topic. It aimed to provide an initial impression to enhance the understanding of vocabulary concepts in the field of linguistics. A total of 120 respondents were selected with 30 students from each school. The 120 figure is very appropriate as it represents 16 percent of the total population from the selected schools.

The place chosen was district of Klang, in the state of Selangor Darul Ehsan, The place was chosen because of the position of the four schools in the city of Kota Kemuning, Shah Alam which is where there are only four national schools in the area. (information obtained from Islamic and Moral Education Unit, PPD Klang). The position of these schools is quite close to each other. From the aspect of infrastructure, learning materials, complete school facilities and the same and structured school environment. A total of four national primary schools were selected for this study, namely SK Bukit Kemuning, SK Bukit Kemuning 2, SK Bukit Rimau and SK Jalan Kebun Klang. These schools have third year students who follow BA subjects in the j-QAF program. This was taken into consideration because not all national schools in the Klang district were involved in the BA j-QAF program. These schools were fully managed schools under KPM in Klang district.

This study employed two types of instruments, namely three sets of actual test questions as the main data, and a questionnaire for the students. The vocabulary selection used for testing in this study comprised 300 words used in years 1, 2 and 3 AL text books that form the Level 1 AL syllabus in primary schools. The selection of words was based on six situations consisting of 10 main topics, namely personality of students, school environment, home, community, market, and at the playground. Specifically, these situations included aspects of learning aids, classrooms, playgrounds, places at school, parts of the body, clothing, numbers and figures, colours and shapes, family members, household appliances, names of areas in the house, food and beverages, fruits, vegetables, plants, animals, transportation, science and technology, hobbies, ambitions, jobs, villages, towns, homeland, time or period, as well as the names of the days and months.

The vocabulary categories found in the AL j-QAF syllabus are the basic Arabic vocabulary, namely nouns and those found in Arabic grammar topics such as pronouns, indicative nouns, the jars particle, masculine and feminine nouns, question words, adjectives of time and place (zorof), single verbs and nouns, multiple and plural letters. Accordingly, the Arabic vocabulary tested in this study is categorized into nine types, namely nouns (objects), pronouns (damir), indicative nouns, the jars particle, object nouns (ism maf'ul), question words, verbs, noun numbers, and sentence structures (al-Tarkib). The listing of the categories is based on years 1, 2, and

3 AL textbooks comprising the KBSR AL j-QAF syllabus and its description.

The vocabulary categories for this study are based on Malay grammar books such as *Nahu Kemaskini* by Asmah (2008) and *Linguistics* by Adrian Akmajian (2002). It also includes Arabic grammar books such as *Mulakhas Qawa'id'Arabiyyah* by Fuad al-Ni 'mat, *Al-Tatbiq al-Nahwiyy* by al-Rajih Abduh and *Sharah Shudhur al-Dhahab fi Ma'rifah Kalam al-'Arab li Ibni Hisyam al-'Ansariy al-Misriy* by Abdul Hamid Mohammad Muhyiddin (1995). The dictionary references include the fourth edition of the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka dictionary 2007*, *al-Mu'jam al-'Arabiyy al-'Asasiy* (1999) and the third edition of the *Arabic Language and Literature Glossary 2004*. Data analysis is based on the results of the vocabulary achievement tests conducted and represent the key inputs for the study. The analysis of the findings refers to the total marks/frequency of vocabulary which was then evaluated according to a percentage value based on the information on the vocabulary performance of the respondents.

FINDINGS

J-QAF Program in KSSR

The j-QAF program was introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and managed by the Islamic Education Division (BPI), formerly known as the Department of Islamic and Moral Education (JAPIM). It is the brainchild of the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Hj. Ahmad Badawi. The main objective of creating a new program like this was to produce primary school students who had completed reciting the entire Quran. He also suggested that the AL be made compulsory, the basics of the obligatory requirements or *Fardhu 'Ain* be internalised, and Jawi strengthened beginning from primary school. This program is also an effort to strengthen the implementation of Islamic education in primary schools. This j-QAF program was implemented on an experimental basis in a pilot project for three months ending in July 2004 while Phase II of the Pilot Project was implemented in two schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur from 1 to 31 October 2004. A policy paper by JAPIM on the implementation of the j-QAF in primary schools was approved by the MOE's management on 30 September 2004.

Since then, the BPI and other parties involved in implementing this initiative took various measures to realize the j-QAF program in the Malaysian education system resulting in several j-QAF Teaching and Learning Modules (T&L) being implemented in selected schools in early 2005. In addition to the modules introduced at the school level, the Human Resources Division of the MOE also made available teachers with a bachelor's degree in Islamic Education or in the AL. The qualifications of these j-QAF Teachers is based on accreditation from the Institute of Teacher Education in

Postgraduate Teaching Courses (KPLI) under the School-Based Teacher Training (LPBS). The use of j-QAF teachers is to fulfil the main objective of the j-QAF program, which is to strengthen Islamic education in the education system as well as to ensure its effective implementation. In general, the initial j-QAF program covered six years from 2005 to 2010 to gauge its effectiveness in the areas of teaching of Jawi, the Quran, Arabic, and the precepts of *Fardhu 'Ain*. The next phase was implemented at the secondary school level beginning in 2011 (see attachment A). As such, the results of this study are important as they enable the researcher to reflect on the performance and effectiveness of the initial 5-year j-QAF program.

The Intervention Models Used in The Study

Two forms of models have been introduced, namely:

a) Teaching model through Rehearsals *وَالْمُحَاكَاةَ وَالنُّكْرَانَ وَالْإِمْلَاءَ* as suggested by al-Khuliy Muhammad Ali (1986: 103), Hassan Basri A. M Dahan (1994: 58) and Ahmad Tu'aimah Rusydi (1998).

b) Learning model through the use of mind maps, as presented by Hassan Basri A. M Dahan (1994: 63) and also based on Semantic Mapping Strategies based on Semantic memory theory by Collins & Quillians (1969) introduced by Johnson and Pearson (1984) (quoted from Norhayuza, 2006: 72).

These models were produced based on the theory of learning and teaching vocabulary especially through the method of drills and mind maps by previous language scholars with some modifications to suit the level of students. The objectives of the models were teaching through vocabulary writing exercises (teaching through drills was aimed at introducing words); and learning model through mind map (aimed at students being able to remember Arabic vocabulary in a systematic and lasting manner).

The Concept of Vocabulary in the j-QAF Program

The vocabulary referred to in this study is the AL vocabulary used in the level 1 j-QAF T&L module (Years 1, 2, 3) in national primary schools. The form of Arabic vocabulary researched in this study focused on Arabic words related to learning situations, namely student personality, school environment, home, playground, market, and community. In general, the vocabulary selected was based on the content of the AL j-QAF syllabus, namely nouns (objects), pronouns (*damir*), indicative nouns, the *jars* particle, object nouns (*Ism Maf'ul*), question words, verbs, noun numbers, and sentence structure (*al-Tarkib*). While the AL syllabus requires primary school students to master 600 words in the j-QAF vocabulary, this study focused on only 300 words of the level 1 primary school syllabus.

Table 1. Overall Grade-based Performance for Test Sets 1, 2 and 3

Question Set	Grade/Percentage										No of Resp	Pass %tage (A+B+C)	Failure %tage (D+E)
	A	%	B	%	C	%	D	%	E	%			
Test Set 1	49	40.8	52	43.3	19	15.8	-	-	-	-	120	100%	-
Test Set 2	22	18.3	47	39.2	32	26.7	19	15.8	-	-	120	84%	16%
Test Set 3	-	-	7	5.8	69	57.5	44	36.7	-	-	120	63%	37%

Table 1 shows the performance of the 120 respondents involved in the three test sets. For Test Set 1 (Arabic spelling), 49 (40.8%) respondents received grade A, 52 (43.3%) received grade B, and 19 (15.8%) received grade C. There were no failures for this test set. For the spelling aspect, there were no failures with all (100%) receiving passing grades of A, B, or C. For Test Set 2 (knowledge of the meaning of Arabic words), 22 (18.3%) of the respondents obtained grade A, 47 (39.2%) received grade B, and 32 (26.7%) grade C for a total pass rate of 84%. Nineteen respondents or 16% failed the test. For Test Set 3 (use of Arabic words in sentences), no respondents obtained an A grade, 7 (5.8%) achieved grade B, and 69 (57.5%) obtained grade C resulting in a total pass rate of 63%. Forty-four respondents (36.7%) failed the test.

This study analyzed the answer scripts of the respondents based on the contents of the AL lessons learned in school. Based on that, two types of analyses were made on the performance of respondents in vocabulary mastery, namely an analysis of test items that were successfully answered and of the numbers that performed exceptionally well.

Findings of the Study for the Word Spelling Aspect

The analysis for the word spelling aspect showed that most respondents successfully answered the test items as shown below:

1) Connected letters into words and deciphered letters. The majority of respondents answered correctly because they knew and understood the proper method of writing the *hija'iyah* letters. Also included in this category are the conjunctions for the syllables. This aspect is included in questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

2) Sign writing (*alif lam Shamsiyyah* and *alif lam Qamariyyah*) and the *syaddah/sukun* sign. For this type of question, most of the respondents knew how to place the mark for the correct words as well as the line mark above the correct letter. This aspect is included in questions 7 and 9.

3) Differences in the nature of the letters. Many respondents managed to answer this category of questions as they could distinguish between the nature of the letters such as ث and س, ع and ء, and ق, ك, and ذ, and ظ and so on. This aspect is included in question 8.

Findings in regard to respondents whose performance was excellent (scale of 8 to 10 marks) for the Arabic word spelling test covered the following aspects:

- 1) Connecting letters related to learning tools (106 respondents).
- 2) Deciphering the letters of words related to the names of objects (117 respondents).
- 3) Completing syllables for words related to colors in AL (73 respondents).
- 4) Completing consonant letters for the verb (*fi'il*) (87 respondents).
- 5) Completing the vowel letters for words relating to AL names for the days and months (71 respondents).
- 6) Determining the spelling of words to match their meaning (67 respondents).

Findings of the Study for the Aspect of Knowledge of Meanings of Words

The analysis conducted in the aspect of knowledge of the meaning of Arabic words, showed that the respondents successfully answered the following test items:

- 1) Matching plural nouns. This is due to the similarity of the original letter with its plural word. This is included in question number 3.
- 2) Conversational expressions. This category is often used in the classroom as well as at home. Conversational expressions such as speeches, greetings and so on are generally used by respondents in their lessons (information obtained from the relevant teacher). This is included in question number 5.
- 3) Numbers and figures. Many respondents answered the form of the question possibly because most really understood the method of writing الأعداد والأرقام taught in the class. This is included in question number 6.
- 4) Lining up the words. This category allowed the researcher to assess whether respondents know the word being tested and understand its meaning. This is included in question number 10.

Findings in regard to respondents whose performance was excellent (scale of 8 to 10 marks) for knowledge of the meaning of Arabic words covered the following aspects:

- 1) Categorizing words related to either parts of the body or family members (69 respondents).
- 2) Determining whether the word relates to sports or hobbies (66 respondents).

- 3) Matching single words and nouns with the plural word (91 respondents).
- 4) Lining up words correctly in relation to the names of objects and places at home or place of residence (68 respondents).

Findings of the Study for the Aspect of Word Use in Sentences

In regard to the use of Arabic words in sentences, many respondents were placed in the unsatisfactory category as gaining competency in the use of words in sentences is relatively difficult. This is because respondents need a high level of skill and a thorough understanding of the meaning of the words in the sentence being tested. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents managed to answer the test items as seen below:

- 1) Use of indicative nouns (*muzakkar and mu'annath*). Respondents were able to answer this question because they fully understood the principles of using indicative nouns and matching their meanings. This aspect is found in questions 1 and 2.
- 2) Matching pronouns and indicative nouns. For this category, many respondents answered correctly because of their knowledge of the usage of indicative nouns. This aspect is found in question 4.
- 3) Matching words with their meaning. For this category respondents succeeded in answering correctly possibly because they understood the Arabic word and its meaning in Malay. This aspect is found in question 6.

As for the other questions, the majority of respondents made mistakes and errors. Among the errors was the inability to understand the context of the sentence as a whole. This indicates that their performance on the use of words in sentences was only at a moderate or satisfactory level. The mistakes and weaknesses of the respondents were in regard to determining the object (*maf'ul*) in a sentence, the use of *ism al-istifham* and matching between verbs (*fi'il*), the performer (*fa'il*), and the object (*maf'ul*).

Findings in regard to excellent results obtained (scale of 8 to 10 marks) for the test in the use of Arabic words in sentences were in the aspects of:

1. Determining the use of indicative nouns in expressions (103 respondents).
2. Determining the use of indicative nouns in verses (106 respondents).
3. Completing sentence with the matching *jars* particle (67 respondents).
4. Completing sentences related to the use of indicative nouns and their pronouns (117 respondents).
5. Completing an essay with appropriate word matches (101 respondents).
6. Composing words for expressions using the correct grammatical method (91 respondents).

Overall, the findings and results of the tests that were conducted in stages on three occasions for the 120 primary school students show that they were able to properly master both the spelling and knowledge of the meaning of Arabic words aspects. However, as in the area of grammar, there is a need to comprehensively address the aspect of word usage in sentences based on the skills and areas involved in the AL. Skills that need to be focused on include the use of words in *istifham* sentences, the use of the *jars* particle, numbering, *sifah* and *mausuf*, possession, word sequences (التركيبات), and sentence structure consisting of verbs, performer, and object [فَاعِل + فِعْل + مَفْعُول + مَفْعُول].

It is clear that while the respondents were proficient in spelling and writing Arabic words as well as in knowing their meanings, the fact remains that they had problems in practicing or using them during the Arabic language learning process. In addition, they could not use Arabic words in a sentence consisting of four or five words as many did not fully understand the words based on the context of the sentences. This should be taken into consideration by AL teachers, especially in the aspects of Arabic vocabulary to enable students to master the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and to practice the vocabulary easily and effectively.

Findings on the Aspect of Frequency (answering correctly) for Test Sets 1, 2 and 3

The findings from the Test Type Specification Table (JSJU) shows that for Test Set 1 (Arabic word spelling) many respondents (648) achieved excellent results. Test Set 2 (knowledge of the meaning of Arabic words) also had many respondents (530) placed in the excellent category. However, for Test Set 3 (use of Arabic words in sentences) many respondents (546) were in the weak category.

Based on the above, the authors would like to suggest that AL teachers at level 2, especially those teaching year-four primary school pupils, should emphasize practical teaching in the use of words for speaking and writing. This practical teaching should be implemented for students who are able to do so through the continuous and consistent application of the enrichment method (الإثراء). For students with disabilities, the focus should be more on teaching guidance and reinforcement (الإصلاح والتعزيز) on the basics of the AL.

CONCLUSION

Overall, level-one students especially in year three of the national primary schools involved in the j-QAF program performed well in mastering the spelling aspect of the AL. However, their performance in mastering the use of Arabic words in sentences was at the low and medium levels. These findings validate the research hypothesis set at the early stage of the study. Knowledge of Arabic words and their meanings among

the students were found to be at the good and excellent levels.

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