The Representation Of Arabian Identity Through Cultural Terms In Arabic Proverbs

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Abstract

One form of language that contains cultural elements is proverbs which in Arabic are called amtsal. This study aims to discover the identity of the Arabians which is represented in cultural terms in the amtsal. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, while data collection is done by reading and writing. The results show two things; the first, Arabic proverbs contain a number of cultural terms, which consist of three types, namely ecology, socio-culture, and artifacts. The second result shows the Arabic identity as seen from the amtsal, with a total of seven identities, namely the custom of war, fondness of traveling, low rainfall, palm trees and the fruit, gold, value time, and honoring science.

Keywords: *Arabian Identity, Cultural Terms, Proverb, Amtsal.*

Introduction

Language is the most dominant element in the process of communication between humans. In the study of the Philosophy of Language, it is associated with three things, namely social, mind, and culture[1]. Cooper clearly stated in his book that language has a powerful relationship with culture. Language has influenced the way individuals and society think and behave. In line with Cooper, Sapir-Whorf also expressed the same idea, almost all elements of culture are expressed in

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[1] David E Cooper, *Filsafat Dan Sifat Bahasa* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2016).

language in various ways. In fact, language is a reflection of social reality that occurs in the form of behavior and habits of a group of people [2].

To connect between language and habbit of society, it need one spesific approach named antropolinguistics. This term is consists of a combination of two fields of knowledge, both are anthropology and lingustic. Anthropology is a branch of science that studies humans and culture as a whole. Antropolylinguistics is a combination of anthropology and linguistics. Simply put, linguistic anthropology is a study that discusses humans and culture related to linguistic functions and the dynamics contained. Anthropology is also often called ethnolinguistics, namely the science that examines language not only in terms of its structure but also in terms of its function and use in socio-cultural contexts [3].

Sapir was one of the pioneers of anthropolinguistic studies [4], he started by opening a new problem, namely the relationship between language and culture. Some of Sapir's views were further developed by his student Benjamin Lee Whorf. Sapir and Whorf argue that the language used by a society indirectly has an influence on the way that society views its environment. The opinion of Sapir and Whorf is then known as the "Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis".[5]

Culture is a collection of knowledge, beliefs, habits, customs, and rules that are owned by humans as individuals in a large ecosystem called society [6]. Culture is a social phenomenon that is very closely related to human behavior and actions which are based on rules, values , and norms that live in society; these rules are documented in several writings which are passed down from generation to

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[2] Aad Nur Sayyidus Syuhuur Baking, "Eufemisme Penerjemahan Istilah Tabu Di Dalam Novel 'Cantik Itu Luka' Ke Dalam Novel Al-Jamalu Jurhun" (Yogyakarta, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2023).

[3] Achril Zalmansyah et al., "The Cultural Identity of Minangkabau and Dayak Kanayatn: An Anthropolinguistic Study," *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 9, no. 2 (2023): 151–62.

[4] Paul Kay and Willett Kempton, "What Is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?," *American Anthropologist* 86, no. 1 (1984): 65–79.

[5] Mardi Nugroho, "Menggali Nilai-Nilai Budaya dalam Peribahasa Etnis untuk Materi Pelajaran Muatan Lokal Bahasa dan Sastra Daerah dalam Pembentukan Wawasan Keindonesiaan: Perspektif Antropolinguistik," *MABASAN* 2, no. 2 (January 18, 2019): 89–108, https://doi.org/10.26499/mab.v2i2.136.

[6] S Sulasman and Setia Gumilar, *Teori-Teori Kebudayaan : Dari Teori Hingga Aplikasi* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2013).

generation to the next generation known as proverbs [7]. One form that representing culture is proverbs.

One of the ways to identify the cultural identity is seen form the cultural terms. Cultural terms is defined as a collection of words that refer to matters related to cultural aspects. These cultural aspects have influenced language so that the vocabulary used by speakers of one language is different from speakers of other languages. One of the media that uses a lot of cultural words or terms is proverbs. Proverbs are considered as a form of language use that can reflect the nature and personality of the speakers [8]. From this statement, it is known that the culture of one community group will have an influence on speakers of the language of that group of people, because language and culture have such a close relationship[9].

In looking at the use of cultural terms, this research refers to the classification of cultural terms by Peter Newmark in his book *"A Textbook of Art Translation".* In the book, it is explained that cultural words consist of five categories; 1) *ecology* which includes geographical features such as flora, fauna, and nature; 2) *material* or *artifacts*, which includes food, clothing, housing or shelter, transportation, and communication; 3) *social culture*, where it includes both work and leisure; 4) *organization* including politics, administration, religion; and 5) *gesture* and *habit* which includes activities or habits that are only carried out by one particular community [10].

Every nation in the world certainly has proverbs, as well as the Arab nation. The Arab nation is known as a nation that is thick with the teachings of wisdom contained in *mahfudzot*. One of the elements of *mahfudzot* is *Amtsal,* or in Indonesian interpreted as proverbs. In each proverb, there will be signs that reflect the culture of a community group. Pierce defines a sign as something that represents something that can be in the form of experiences, thoughts, ideas, and

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[7] Sri Wahyu Istana Trahutann, "NILAI BUDAYA DALAM PERIBAHASA JEPANG," *Sabda : Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan* 8, no. 1 (October 1, 2013): 43, https://doi.org/10.14710/sabda.v8i1.13238.
[8] Wenni Rusbiyantoro, "METAFORA DAN NILAI BUDAYA DALAM PERIBAHASA BAHASA MELAYU KUTAI" 11 (2016): 8.
[9] Cooper, *Filsafat Dan Sifat Bahasa*.
[10] Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (Prentice Hall International, 1988).

thoughts [11]. Proverbs can be a reflection of the culture of a nation because of the many elements of culture and habits that exist in it. Departing from these several things, this research will focus on two problems, they are (1) What are the cultural terms in Arabic proverbs or *amtsal*? (2) What are the identities of the Arab nation contained within *amtsal*?

Research on proverbs and cultural values has been carried out by several researchers before. Trahutann (2013) examined Japanese cultural values through Japanese proverbs. The research revealed that there are good values contained in Japanese proverbs, including the value of always living in togetherness, valuing time, and working hard, as well as teachings to repay the kindness of others. Furthermore, Nugroho [12], in his research entitled "Exploring Cultural Values in Ethnic Proverbs for Subject Matter Local Language and Regional Literature in Forming Indonesian Insights" found that ethnic proverbs contain cultural values that can be taught as a guide in life. Another study was conducted by Azizi et al [13], which focused on comparing Arabic and Indonesian cultures in their proverbs. The study results show that Arabic and Indonesian proverbs have similarities at the semantic level, but the different lexical uses indicate cultural differences between the two languages. Meanwhile, Hestiyana [14] also conducted a similar study that focused on religious values in Banjar proverbs.

From the several studies above, it can be seen that the research which is focusing in examinng the culture terms and cultural values within *amtsal* spesifically which is interpreted to be the identity of the Arabic people has not been discussed yet. Therefore, this research with the specific focus in the study of language and culture is expected to be able to add to the knowledge of these two studies.

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[11] Bambang Mudjiyanto and Emilsyah Nur, "Semiotika Dalam Metode Penelitian Komunikasi," *Jurnal Penelitian Komunikasi* 16, no. 1 (2013): 10.

[12] Nugroho, "Menggali Nilai-Nilai Budaya dalam Peribahasa Etnis untuk Materi Pelajaran Muatan Lokal Bahasa dan Sastra Daerah dalam Pembentukan Wawasan Keindonesiaan."

[13] Yasmin Azizi et al., "Refleksi Budaya dalam Konstruksi Ungkapan Peribahasa (Analisis Komparatif Budaya Arab dan Indonesia dalam Ungkapan Peribahasa Bermakna Sepadan)," *Diwan* 10, no. 20 (December 5, 2018): 985–1000, https://doi.org/10.15548/diwan.v10i20.161.

[14] Hestiyana Hestiyana, "NILAI-NILAI RELIGIUS DALAM PERIBAHASA BANJAR," *Sirok Bastra* 3, no. 2 (April 25, 2018), https://doi.org/10.37671/sb.v3i2.62.

Methode

This study used descriptive qualitative method research conducted based on existing facts and phenomena [15]. The data in this study are in the form of words and phrases that are included in cultural terms according to the classification of cultural terms according to Newmark (1988). Research data comes from the book *al-mahfudzat* as primer data which is a book of Arabic proverbs taught in several Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia and some secondary data obtained from the internet. Book *al-mahfudzat* contained a group of wise words in Arabic that consists of proverbs, advice, and suggestion. The data applied in this research is only limited to wise expressions with proverbs.

The data collection technique was carried out by reading and writing, the author read the primary data sources and secondary sources from the internet and then recorded proverbs that contained cultural elements. The data that has been obtained is then analyzed in several stages. The author will look for cultural words or terms found in Arabic proverbs then adapt similar proverbs in Indonesian to further facilitate the writer in expressing the use of words that contain cultural elements and symbols in *amtsal* in accordance with the cultural context of the Arab nation to further interpret the cultural values contained in each of these proverbs by using library and literature methods. This stage ends with drawing conclusions from the interpretation of the previous data and then presenting it in the form of a description to explain the identity of the Arab nation which is reflected in the *amtsal*.

Results and Discussions

Proverbs explained by Widyastuti, are traditional expressions in the form of sentences containing teachings, values, norms, advice, and principles. It was also explained that proverbs are part of a culture that is passed down from generation to generation with the aim of maintaining virtuous values to be used as a guide in living life. Proverbs have existed since time immemorial, as well as Arabic proverbs. In Arab, proverbs are called *amtsal* which is the plural form of

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[15] Polce Aryanto Bessie, *Metode Penelitian Linguistik Terjemahan* (Jakarta Barat: PT. Indeks, 2017).

the word *matsal*. Literally, *matsal* means simile, which means that *matsal* contains a parable that can be used as a guide in living life. *Amtsal* becomes interesting since it was created departing from one event which is then often repeated by the society so that it becomes famous and is used as a parable with the aim of serving as advice, rules, as well as life principles [16]

From several sources that have been collected, the following are some Arabic proverbs that contain cultural elements:

Table 1

Proverbs that contain cultural words and their meanings

Proverbs	Meaning
قَبْلَ الرِّماءِ تُمْلَأُ الكَنائِنُ	Fill arrows before battle
مَنْ عَرَفَ بُعدَ السَّفَرِ اسْتَعَدَّ	Whoever knows how far a journey is, should prepare
إذا تَمَّ العَقلُ قَلَّ الكَلامُ	When the mind is perfect, then it will talk a little
هل يُرتَجي مَطَر بِغَيرِ سَحَابٍ	Expect rain without clouds
الوَقتُ كالسَّيفِ	Time is like a sword
الوَقتُ أَثْمَنُ مِنَ الذهَبِ	Time is more valuable than gold
بَيضَةُ اليَومِ خيرٌ مِن دَجَاجاتِ الغَدِ	Today's egg is better than tomorrow's chicken

لا تُؤَخِّر عمَلَكَ إلى الغَدِ ما تَقدِرُ أن تَعْمَلَهُ اليَوْمَ	Don't put off your work until tomorrow if you can do it today.
إنَّهُ لاشَبيهَ بِه من التَّمرَةِ بِالتمْرَةِ	In fact there is no difference between it and dates
مَنْ حَفَرَ حُفرَةً وَقَعَ فِيْهَا	Whoever digs a hole, he will fall into it.
ترى الفَتيَانِ كالنَّخلِ وَمَا يُدْرِك ما الدَّخْل	You see young men like palm trees, and you do not know what is in them.
لِكُلِّ صَارِمٍ نَبوَةٌ وَلِكُلِّ جَوَادٍ كبوَة ولكل عالِم هفوة	every sharp sword can miss, every horse can slip and every wise one can be wrong
من الشَّوكَة تَخْرُجُ الوردةُ	Roses grow from thorns

From the data shown above, it can be seen that there are several types of cultural words contained in the Arabic proverbs or known as *amtsal*. Furthermore, these cultural words will be analyzed further to identify the cultural elements contained in them.

A. Types of Cultural Words

As explained in the introduction, in identifying the types of cultural words, the writer will utilize the classification of cultural words as formulated by Newmark. According to Newmark, the term culture is a term that refers to certain objects or things which are the result of the thoughts of certain groups of people. This

includes food and drink, vehicles, and objects used in everyday life, such as clothing [17]. Furthermore, he also defines culture as a pattern or way of life and its various manifestations that are identical to a community, in which they use a certain language as a tool to express their intentions and goals [18]

Based on the classification formulated by Newmark, the researcher found several types of words with deep cultural content *al-amtsal al-*Arabiya, namely ecology, social culture, and materials. A more detailed explanation will be presented below:

1.   Ecology

First type of cultural terms founded in the shown data is ecolpgy. The cultural terms with the type of ecology is the type of word that is most often found. This type of cultural terms defined as the terms that contained a word or terms of things about ecology, such as tree, water, earth, name of animals, and many other. Basically, proverbs contain a lot of ecological elements that reflect the identity of the origin of these proverbs. From the collected data, the authors found several forms of ecological words that exist within *amtsal,* namely: horses, chickens, dates, date palms, rain, clouds, chicken eggs roses and thorns.

2.   Socio-cultural

The second type of cultural term classification is the type of word that contains socio-cultural content. What is meant by socio-cultural content is work. The words of the socio-cultural type in the data above are: digging a hole, traveling, fighting, and talking a little. Based on the data, it is known that some terms describe certain jobs or activities carried out by humans. This activity certainly contains cultural content because it is only usually carried out by some people and certain communities. The work contained within *amtsal* of course contains its own

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[17] Dewi Puspitasari, Eka Marthanty Indah Lestari, and Nadya Inda Syartanti, "KESEPADANAN PADA PENERJEMAHAN KATA BERMUATAN BUDAYA JEPANG KE DALAM BAHASA INDONESIA : Studi Kasus dalam Novel Botchan Karya Natsume Soseki dan Terjemahannya Botchan Si Anak Bengal oleh Jonjon Johana," *IZUMI* 3, no. 2 (July 1, 2014): 1, https://doi.org/10.14710/izumi.3.2.1-14.
[18] P A P Sudana, "ANALISIS PENERJEMAHAN ISTILAH BUDAYA PADA NOVEL NEGERI 5 MENARA KE DALAM BAHASA INGGRIS: KAJIAN DESKRIPTIF BERORIENTASI TEORI NEWMARK" 3, no. 2 (2014): 11.

things that can become a habit which can then be interpreted as the identity of Arab society.

3.   Materials or artifacts

The third type of cultural terms founded in the Arabic proverbs is type of material and artifact. Arabic proverbs also use a lot of cultural terms that fall into the material category. The material category in cultural terms refers to goods and things that are found in a group of society, as well as what is written on *amtsal*. In addition to general objects and items, this type also refers to objects with artifact types. From the results of reading the data, it was found that three types of objects in Arabic proverbs contained cultural elements, namely swords, gold, and arrows.

These objects are considered to be included in cultural words because according to Eshraq (2014) true cultural vocabulary is a word the meaning can change if it is used in a different culture and has a different value from that change (Fatmawati & Setiawan, 2020). Some of the words that refer to this material have a correlation with the identity of the Arab itself. It is said that the use of one language in proverbs is actually because the word is considered close to its speakers.

B. Identity of the Arabian in their proverbs

Sapir-Whorf is a person who asserts that there is a close bond between language and culture [19]. This concept was also validated by Cooper in his book "The Philosophy of Language." Apart from saying that language is a picture of what the social conditions of its speakers are, he further examines Sapir-Whorf's thoughts on how language influences people's way of thinking so as to form a particular culture. From there it can be concluded that language and culture influence each other and are difficult to separate.

Quoting one of the Indonesian proverbs which says "Language shows the identity of a nation", then we will look more deeply at the relationship between the cultural terms used in *amtsal* and the interpretation *amtsal* itself which is assumed

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[19] Leonid Perlovsky, "Language and Emotions: Emotional Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis," *Neural Networks* 22, no. 5–6 (2009): 518–26.

to be a reflection of the identity of the Arab nation. From the analysis that has been done, it is found seven things that reflect the identity of the Arab nation. This form is the result of the classification of words that contain elements of culture and also see their equivalence in Indonesian proverbs. The following are the explanation of the seven identities:

1. Habit of War

Arabia is an area of countries that are geographically located in deserts [20]. The geographical factors have influenced the character of the Jahiliyyah Arabs, often fighting between clans and tribes. Even at the time of the advent of Islam, war was still something that was done to expand the area of Islam known as *ghazwah*. So it is not surprising that in some Arabic proverbs there are many expressions or words that refer to war. One example is:

<div dir="rtl">

قَبْلَ الرِّماءِ تُملأُ الكَنائِنُ

</div>

Fill the bow before the battle.

In Indonesian, this proverb has an equivalent, namely "*Sedia paying sebelum hujan*" (prepare an umbrella before it rains). From these two proverbs, it can be seen that cultural differences also affect the choice of vocabulary used in proverbs in each language. In Arabic, to compare the need for preparation in everything using the term to fill the bow before going to war, while in Indonesian it is more likened to preparing an umbrella before it rains. The Arabs use the parable of war because it is closer to them, just like the rain that Indonesians often feel. This custom is also supported by the use of words such as arrows and swords, where the word refers to objects commonly used as weapons in war. Apart from that, there were also horses that became their vehicles when fighting, as told in several Arab historical literature.

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[20] Muhammad Satir, "Kehidupan Sosial Masyarakat Arab Masa Awal Kehadiran Pendidikan Islam," *AL-FIKR: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (July 1, 2019): 39–48, https://doi.org/10.32489/alfikr.v5i1.17.

2. Love to Travel

The next identity is the habit of the Arab people to travel to one place for different purposes, including for trade, study or other reasons. This is stated in the proverb with the meaning "Whoever knows how far one journey is, he should be prepared". At first glance, this proverb seems common because it can be used by almost all groups of people, including things that are commonplace for them. But the question is why do only Arabs use this proverb? Because traveling long distances or traveling has also become a habit of the ignorant Arab people long before the existence of modern means of transportation. And we can find several other proverbs that do contain elements of encouragement to travel and leave one's hometown with a clear purpose, for example:

سَافِر تَجِدْ عِوَضًا عَمَنْ تُفَارِقُهُ

Go abroad, surely you will get a replacement for what you left.

أُطلُب العِلمَ ولو بالصينِ

Demand knowledge even as far as China/Tiongkok.

These two examples are concrete evidence of the habit of the Arabs in traveling so that it can be said that it is included in their identity as a nation. This example confirms that Arabs are instilled with the value of not being afraid to go to new places for various purposes such as trading and studying. Therefore, the love of traveling is synonymous with Arab society to this day.

3. Low Rainfall

One of the data analyses above has the meaning "expecting rain without clouds/overcast". This proverb is to express something that is difficult or even impossible to achieve, for example success without effort. What is interesting is the use of 'rain' as a parable in this proverb. Arabian Peninsula countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, etc., have very low rainfall intensity each year. This is due to geographical factors. Since rain is rare in these countries, it is natural for Arabs to describe rain as something that is very hard to come by.

Therefore, the rare phenomenon of rain is included in the identity of the Arab nation itself.

This proverb will of course change if it is used in other languages. For example, in Indonesian the proverb that is used to describe something that is very difficult to reach is "The heart means to hug the mountain, what power the hands can't reach". These proverbs have the same meaning but the vocabulary used is different. In Indonesian, the word "Mountain" is used as a simile, because if you look at it geographically, Indonesia does have many towering mountains. Therefore, the choice of words in proverbs really describes the conditions in which the language exists.

4. Date Trees and Fruits

Dates are not foreign to the Arabs. In fact, this fruit can be said to be the most identic identity of the Arabs besides camels. This fruit is very much found in the Arab region. Hot and arid geographical conditions are a suitable habitat for growing dates, because it has roots that grow deep into the ground. Therefore, it is not surprising that this fruit is often used as a parable in proverbs, as an example to express something very similar. In Indonesia, maybe we are more familiar with the proverb "like a betel nut is halved", or the proverb of the Bugis people *"alosi ripolo dua"*. However, in Arabic a similar proverb is made up of a man and a palm tree.

Dates have indeed become the identity of the Arab nation because this plant grows in the region. In fact, tourists usually make dates as souvenirs that they bring back from the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, especially pilgrims and Umrah pilgrims in Saudi Arabia. Because of the strong connection between the date palm and Arab society, it is also used as a proverb that describes the identity of the nation.

5. Gold

Gold is considered as one of the identities of the Arab community. In the book "A Short History of Arabs" written by Philip K. Hitti [21], it is stated that during the Arab Jahiliyah era, gold was used as a trading tool or trade transaction. In contrast to Indonesia, which uses money as a transaction tool. So in the example *amtsal*:

الوقت أَثْمَنُ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ

Time is more expensive than gold.

In this proverb, time is said to be more expensive than gold. In the equivalent proverbs in Indonesia, we find the expression "*waktu adalah uang"* (time is money). This is one of the characteristics of the existing culture. The use of gold as a means of transaction has made the Arabs regard it as something very valuable. In fact, to this day we can still find the use of gold as a medium of exchange, such as the state of Kuwait which still uses dirhams and dinars as a medium of exchange with a very high value. Therefore, gold is also categorized as the identity of the Arab nation because the use of this proverb departs from their buying and selling activities that still use gold even during the Jahiliyyah period to this day.

6. Valuing Time

Continuing the discussion about the Westernized time being more expensive than gold, we finally conclude that Arab society is a collection of individuals who value time very much. This hypothesis is strengthened by another discussion that alludes to the importance of "time" which reads:

الوقت كالسيف إن لم تقطعه قطعك

Time is like a sword. If you don't use it, it will cut you.

This expression clearly illustrates how assertive the Arabs are in describing the importance of appreciating time and taking advantage of every available opportunity before regret becomes the fruit of neglect of time as in the expression

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[21] Philip Khuri Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (Regnery Publishing, 1996).

"today's egg is better than tomorrow's chicken". It means that arabian put a big attention in utilizing their times and all the chance they have.

7. Honoring Science

The final point that becomes the identity of the Arab nation is how they respect knowledgeable people and knowledge itself. There are dozens of Arabic proverbs that talk about the importance of guiding knowledge and the glory of knowledgeable people. The assumption that Arabs highly honor science is that there are many world scholars who were born in Arab countries in various fields of knowledge, such as Ibn Rushdi, Ibn Sina, Imam Al-Ghazali. In the field of linguistics, there are the names Abu Aswad Ad-Duali, Ibn Jinni, Ibn Ahmad Alfarahidi who are classics. As for the modern era, there are Ibrahim Anis, Mahdy Al-Makhzumi and several other linguistic scientists. If it weren't for the teachings rooted in Arab culture about the importance of science, then the names above would never have been heard of.

One interesting proverb in Indonesian is "*Tong kosong nyaring* bunyinya" (an empty barrel makes a loud sound) which in Arabic is used "when the mind is perfect, then speak less". In the study of cognitive linguistics initiated by Lakoof, the use of perspective in one sentence has its own reasons. In this case, Arab society views from the point of view of people who are silent while Indonesian society makes people who talk a lot as their main perspective. From this, it can be concluded that the Arab nation values knowledgeable people more from the perspective of the subject in the proverb.

Conclusion

From the results of the research described above, it can be concluded that learning media designed based on Android using the MIP App Inventor application are suitable for use as alternative media for learning Arabic. This is based on the assessment of material experts and media experts which concludes that this media is feasible to use. In addition, based on the results of limited trials, it was found that this media was feasible to be used as a smartphone-based alternative media in learning Arabic.

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