

Faith, Motivation, and Language Anxiety: Psychological Impacts of Arabic Language Training for Malaysian Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims

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Abstract

This article investigates the psychological impacts—focusing on faith, motivation, and language anxiety—of Arabic language training for Malaysian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Drawing upon recent empirical findings from a dedicated Arabic course designed for pilgrimage, the study demonstrates how spiritual aspirations intertwine with language learning, shaping emotional well-being, self-efficacy, and religious experience among participants.

keywords: motivation, Hajj, Umrah, Arabic Course

INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage represents a convergence of ritual, spirituality, and cross-cultural communication. For Malaysian Muslims, the requirement to perform prayers, supplications, and rituals in Arabic during Hajj and Umrah introduces unique psychological dynamics. While ritual proficiency is paramount, the path to mastery is often accompanied by anxiety, varying levels of motivation, and profound spiritual desire.

Arabic is the primary language spoken across the Arabian Peninsula, including countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and other Islamic nations. It has been the language of scholars for over 1,400 years, tracing back to the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The revelation of the Holy Quran in Arabic has led to the widespread use of the language throughout the world. Muslims of diverse ethnicities, cultures, and native tongues are required to recite their daily worship, including the rites of Hajj and Umrah, in Arabic, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Arabic is regarded as the "language of the spirit" and serves as the communicative medium in performing Islamic rituals (Elsheakh et al., 2021; Holmes, 2013; Rouchdy, 2013).

The religious status of Arabic is foundational to Islamic practice because the Quran, considered the literal word of God, was revealed exclusively in Arabic, imbuing the language with sacred significance and unparalleled spiritual authority (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Elsheakh et al., 2021). Mastery of Arabic is essential for authentic comprehension and recitation of the Quran and Sunnah, without which the theological and linguistic

nuances might be lost (Al-Shatibi, 1997; Al-Shafi'i, 1940). Consequently, Arabic functions not only as a liturgical language but also as a symbol of Islamic identity and unity among Muslims globally, transcending ethnic and linguistic differences (Rouchdy, 2013).

Moreover, Arabic historically has been the vehicle for the transmission of Islamic civilization's intellectual, cultural, and scientific heritage (Elsheakh et al., 2021). The continuity of Arabic through centuries underscores its pivotal role not only in religious rites such as prayer and pilgrimage but also in upholding the moral and cultural values of the Muslim ummah (Grunebaum, 1982; Elsheakh et al., 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of the Arabic Language Training Course for Hajj and Umrah is to facilitate Malaysian pilgrims in fulfilling their religious obligations with linguistic accuracy and confidence, while simultaneously addressing the psychological factors that influence their language performance and spiritual experience. Specifically, the course aims to help pilgrims:

- i. Develop a sound understanding of essential ritual utterances, including *niat* (intentions), *doa* (supplications), and *zikir* (remembrances), thereby deepening spiritual engagement and reinforcing faith during Hajj and Umrah.
- ii. Enhance communicative competence in Arabic to facilitate meaningful interactions at pilgrimage sites, reducing social and linguistic barriers that contribute to anxiety and dependency.
- iii. Build confidence in engaging with Arabic speakers to manage practical matters autonomously, thereby fostering a sense of self-efficacy and motivation.
- iv. Minimize reliance on intermediaries or guides by empowering pilgrims with functional Arabic language skills, leading to reduced anxiety and increased independence in performing rites.
- v. Improve the overall quality and completeness of religious observance by integrating accurate language use with psychological readiness.
- vii. Implement structured and academically grounded language education tailored for religious purposes that addresses motivational factors and alleviates language anxiety among adult learners embarking on pilgrimage.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CHALLENGES IN PERFORMING HAJJ AND UMRAH

For Muslims in Malaysia, Arabic is not an unfamiliar language. From birth, they have been exposed to Arabic phrases such as the adhan (call to prayer) and *iqamah*, which are inherently in Arabic. In daily life, they indirectly engage with Arabic when reciting prayers and performing ablution (*wudu*), adhan, *iqamah*, salah (*prayer*), and reading various supplications. In fact, three of the five pillars of Islam are wholly performed using

Arabic: the declaration of faith (*shahadah*), ritual prayer (*salah*), and pilgrimage (*Hajj* and *Umrah*).

However, language difficulties become apparent when Malaysian pilgrims undertake Hajj and Umrah. Although these acts of worship are primarily physical rituals, the *niat* (intention), *doa* (supplication), and *zikir* (remembrance) must be verbally pronounced in Arabic. Understanding these utterances is essential for pilgrims to complete their worship properly.

It is problematic and incongruous for pilgrims to perform worship and recite prayers whose meanings they do not understand. Even in *salah*, it is recommended to comprehend the recitations, although understanding is not a prerequisite for the validity of the prayer.

Most Hajj and Umrah preparatory courses in Malaysia focus mainly on procedural execution of the rituals, literal Islamic jurisprudence, and health management. While these courses offer some support, they are insufficient for achieving perfection and completeness in worship.

Therefore, a dedicated Arabic language course is necessary to assist pilgrims in improving the quality of their Hajj and Umrah rituals, particularly in understanding and correctly pronouncing the ritual speech during the pilgrimage. This situation highlights the psychological dimensions involved in language use during Islamic worship, especially among non-Arabic speakers preparing for pilgrimage. The following research connects to the psychological impacts of Arabic language training for Malaysian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims

Studies in language anxiety and spiritual performance show that language anxiety can hinder meaningful ritual participation and affect spiritual confidence (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). In the context of Hajj and Umrah, language barriers in Arabic may trigger anxiety, reducing pilgrims' self-efficacy and emotional well-being.

Faith serves as a powerful intrinsic motivator in adult language acquisition, especially when language learning is directly connected to religious fulfilment (Dörnyei, 2005). Enhancing comprehension of Arabic ritual phrases through training can increase pilgrims' motivation and reduce feelings of inadequacy.

While ritual validity does not strictly require understanding, comprehension enriches the worship experience and supports psychological comfort and engagement (Saleh, 2019). Language courses that focus on meaning, pronunciation, and contextual usage help reduce cognitive dissonance, anxiety, and dependency on guides.

Research also indicates that conventional preparatory courses insufficiently address linguistic and psychological needs, highlighting the necessity for targeted Arabic language instruction integrated with motivational and affective strategies (Aziz et al., 2020).

USE OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE COURSE MODULE FOR THE PURPOSES OF HAJJ AND UMRAH

In order to achieve the objectives of the Arabic Language Course designed specifically for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, a comprehensive module has been developed and employed as a primary instructional and reference material for participants. The effectiveness of this module is integral to the success of the course and serves as an empirical indicator of learners' progress and preparedness.

The Arabic Language Course Module for Hajj and Umrah is systematically divided into three essential components:

- i. Basic Arabic Grammar (*Nahu Arab Ringkas*): This section provides foundational syntactical knowledge to enable learners to understand and construct simple, accurate ritual utterances. Grammatical familiarity reduces cognitive load during recital and fosters greater confidence, thereby mitigating anxiety associated with language use in sacred contexts.
- ii. Selected Ritual Recitations (*Lafaz Bacaan Terpilih*): This component focuses on the memorization, understanding, and proper pronunciation of key phrases such as niat (intentions), doa (supplications), and zikir (remembrances), which are indispensable during Hajj and Umrah. Emphasizing meaning comprehension alongside phonological accuracy enhances spiritual engagement, reinforcing motivation and the sense of authenticity in worship.
- iii. Communication Skills (*Komunikasi*): Given the multilingual nature of pilgrimage sites, this portion trains learners to engage in practical, everyday interactions in Arabic—ranging from inquiries to simple transactions with Arab-speaking individuals. The ability to communicate independently contributes positively to self-efficacy and reduces dependency, which is often a significant source of learner anxiety.

The modular approach to Arabic language training addresses both the linguistic and affective needs of Malaysian pilgrims. Research in second language acquisition underscores that adult learners—especially those learning languages for religious purposes—encounter unique psychological challenges such as language anxiety and fluctuating motivation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dörnyei, 2005). This module's clear structure assists learners in setting achievable goals, allowing incremental progress that enhances self-confidence.

Moreover, deepening comprehension of ritual language cultivates spiritual motivation grounded in increased religious meaning-making—pilgrims no longer merely recite words but understand and internalize their significance, fostering a richer worship experience. By incorporating communicative practice, the module also helps alleviate performance anxiety associated with social interactions in a non-native language, which is particularly important in the complex and multifaceted environments of pilgrimage. Reducing this anxiety can empower pilgrims to navigate logistical challenges efficiently and engage more fully in the pilgrimage alongside diverse Muslim and non-

Muslim populations. Finally, the module contributes to promoting linguistic and religious identity cohesion among Malaysian pilgrims, reinforcing a strong sense of belonging to the global ummah while supporting individual agency during Hajj and Umrah (Elsheakh et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach was employed to comprehensively assess the psychological impacts of the Arabic language training on Malaysian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-course questionnaires that measured variables such as language anxiety, motivation, and self-assessed competence, providing statistically reliable indicators of learners' progress (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005).

Complementing this, qualitative data were obtained via focus groups and in-depth interviews, which explored participants' emotional experiences and spiritual reflections, thereby adding depth and contextual nuance to the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The validity and reliability of these instruments have been established in previous research examining language learning affective factors and religious education contexts, ensuring robust and meaningful data collection (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

EVALUATION OF COURSE EFFECTIVENESS

Participants of the Arabic language course for Hajj and Umrah were given the opportunity to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the course. Out of 50 attendees, 40 participants took part in completing the questionnaire. This was conducted to obtain feedback and to ensure that the course objectives were achieved. Additionally, the evaluation aimed to improve the quality and effectiveness of future courses. The questionnaire contained six questions focusing on assessing the participants' level of understanding and confidence in the context of performing Hajj and Umrah.

a) Overall Evaluation Of The Module Used For The Arabic Language Course For Hajj And Umrah

Based on the overall evaluation of the module, respondents provided overwhelmingly positive feedback (100%) regarding the module provided. The feedback is as follows:

- a. The knowledge and skills acquired facilitate the performance and meaningful experience of Hajj and Umrah rituals.
- b. Overall, the module is very helpful and effective.
- c. The practical exercises included in the module assist in learning its content.
- d. The module is easy to carry and use.
- e. The design and arrangement of the module's contents meet the requirements of performing Hajj and Umrah.

The findings indicate that respondents are confident that the Arabic language module for Hajj and Umrah can streamline and support their pilgrimage rituals. Furthermore, the

inclusion of practical exercises simplifies learning the module's content. Additionally, the module's portability and ease of use were appreciated. Respondents also stated their interest in having this module developed in software or digital form.

The comprehensive evaluation of the Arabic Language Course Module for Hajj and Umrah reveals significant pedagogical strengths and positive psychological outcomes for Malaysian pilgrims. Participants overwhelmingly provided favourable feedback, highlighting how the knowledge and skills acquired through the module facilitated smoother and more meaningful participation in pilgrimage rituals. Many regarded the module as highly effective and appreciated the practical exercises, which enhanced engagement and helped internalize the learning content. Furthermore, the module's portability and user-friendly design were seen as important advantages, as was the careful organization of its content to align closely with the practical requirements of Hajj and Umrah.

These strengths of the module have important psychological implications. Mastery of essential ritual utterances and communication skills helped reduce participants' language-related anxieties, boosting learners' confidence and sense of preparedness. The structured and practical nature of the exercises served as a buffer against language anxiety, enabling pilgrims to approach their worship with greater assurance. At the same time, the module's clear alignment between linguistic outcomes and participants' spiritual goals fostered high intrinsic motivation, encouraging persistence throughout the learning process. This empowerment also led to enhanced autonomy, as pilgrims felt less dependent on guides or intermediaries, allowing them to manage their rituals independently. Reflecting this positive experience, many respondents expressed enthusiasm for the idea of developing a digital version of the module, which could further increase accessibility and learner support.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings underscore the value of incorporating active learning strategies such as hands-on exercises that promote retention and engagement. The contextual relevance of the module's content was essential in maintaining learner focus and motivation. The expressed interest in digital adaptations suggests future opportunities to expand and personalize Arabic language training for pilgrimage in ways that better accommodate diverse learning needs.

In sum, the Arabic Language Course Module offers both effective linguistic training and meaningful psychological support. By integrating practical ritual needs with strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance motivation, the module empowers Malaysian pilgrims to perform their religious duties with greater confidence, understanding, and independence.

QUESTIONNAIRE

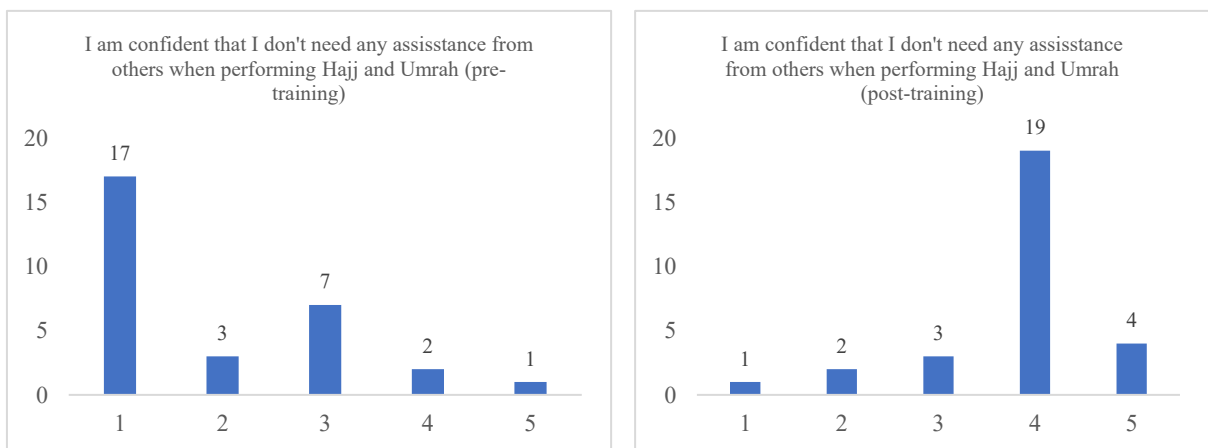
In order to systematically assess participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the Arabic Language Course for Hajj and Umrah, a structured questionnaire was employed. This instrument was adapted from established surveys, both of which have been widely utilized in educational and psychological research to measure attitudes, motivations, and self-efficacy. The adaptation ensured the questionnaire was contextually relevant to the linguistic and affective dimensions of pilgrimage-related language learning.

The questionnaire comprises a series of statements designed to capture participants' levels of agreement across key constructs such as language anxiety, motivation, comprehension, and confidence in performing religious rites in Arabic. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), enabling nuanced quantitative analysis of attitudes. This approach aligns with best practices in language education research, facilitating the reliable and valid measurement of affective variables critical to understanding learners' psychological experiences.

FINDINGS

a) Baseline Psychological State Prior to Language Training

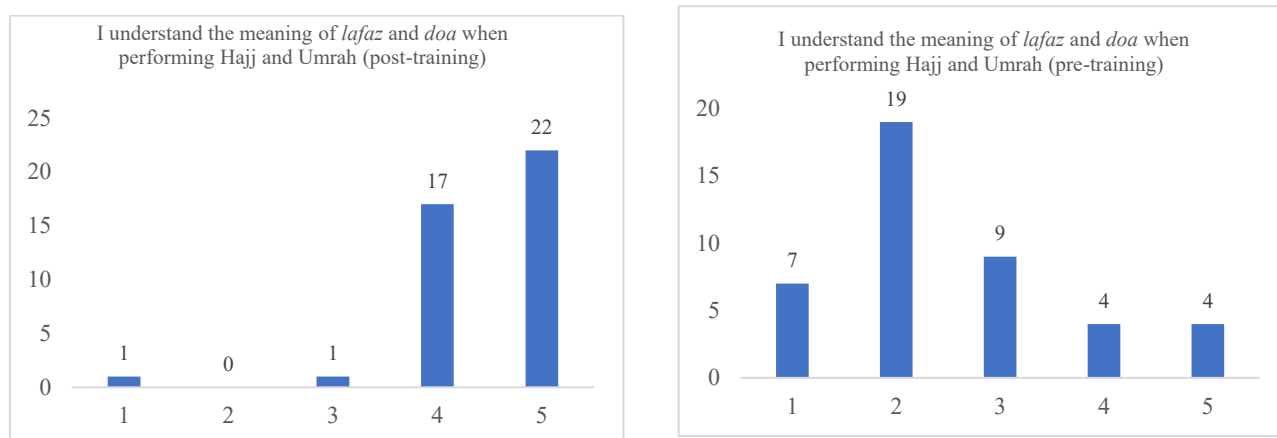
Before beginning the Arabic language course, participants largely exhibited limited comprehension and low self-assurance in using Arabic during the Hajj and Umrah rituals. Most respondents selected the lowest agreement scores when asked about their understanding of core ritual phrases (*niat*, *doa*, *zikir*), with 60% reporting that they did not understand the meaning of the *niat* (intention) phrases, 65% unclear about the meaning of *doa* (supplication), and 60% lacking understanding of *zikir* (remembrance). Confidence levels were similarly low: 75% did not feel prepared to interact in Arabic at pilgrimage sites, 67.5% lacked confidence in communicating with Arab nationals, and 75% doubted their ability to manage independently without assistance from others. Collectively, these findings reflect significant psychological barriers, including high levels of language-related anxiety and a lack of self-efficacy, that could diminish both the spiritual and practical experience of pilgrimage.



Graph 1: Comparison on Level of Confidence to Perform Hajj and Umrah Without Assistance (pre and post training)

Based on the graph above, overall, the plotted readings show a significant increase in participants' understanding and confidence in the Arabic language course for Hajj and Umrah purposes. This improvement is evident from the shift in response choices for each question from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. This increase clearly demonstrates the success of the course conducted, even though there are still some participants who

remain less confident about interacting in Arabic and continue to rely on the assistance of others during the pilgrimage.

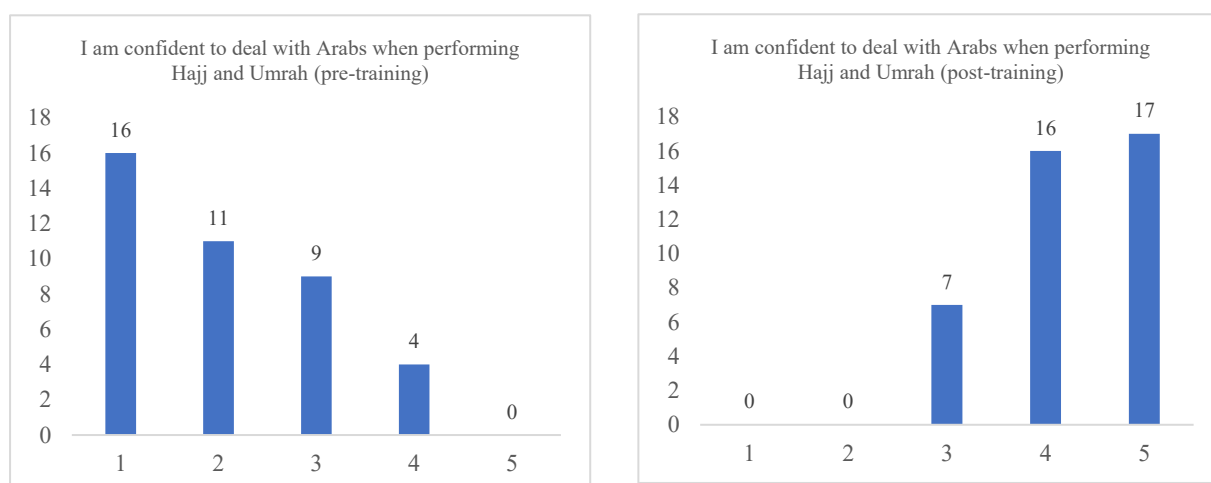


Graph 2: Confidence in understanding the meaning of *lafaz* and *doa* when performing Hajj and Umrah (pre and post training)

b) Effects of Course Participation on Comprehension and Confidence

Completion of the Arabic language training module was associated with substantial gains in both understanding and self-confidence. Quantitative data revealed a marked shift towards higher agreement scores: respondents increasingly indicated that they understood the key ritual phrases and felt more comfortable engaging in Arabic conversation in pilgrimage contexts. The improved comprehension extended across *doa*, *niat*, and *zikir*, as well as general communicative scenarios encountered during Hajj and Umrah. Whereas some participants continued to express reservations about their communicative competence and full independence, the overall trend demonstrated remarkable progress in readiness and capability for carrying out religious rituals.

d) Enhanced Motivation and Autonomy



Graph 3: Confidence to deal with Arabs when performing Hajj and Umrah (pre and post training)



Graph 4: Confidence to interact in Arabic at selected locations to be visited (pre and post training)

Improved understanding and confidence fostered higher intrinsic motivation among learners to participate actively in both the linguistic and spiritual dimensions of their pilgrimage. Many participants noted a strengthened desire to use and further develop their Arabic skills, aligned with their religious goals. The training also promoted increased autonomy, reducing dependence on guides or intermediaries and empowering participants to perform rituals more independently. This enhancement in self-efficacy played a pivotal role in elevating the overall quality of worship and personal fulfilment during Hajj and Umrah.

MODULE EVALUATION AND LEARNER SATISFACTION

The module received unanimously positive feedback from respondents. Participants emphasized its practical relevance, portability, and accessible presentation. The inclusion of practical exercises was especially valued, as it facilitated active learning and retention. Furthermore, the thoughtful design and logical arrangement of content ensured alignment with the real needs of pilgrims, with most respondents expressing interest in a digital version of the module to further enhance accessibility and learning opportunities

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A prominent finding was the significant reduction in language anxiety among course participants. The combination of structured instruction, practical exercises, and accessible module design helped to alleviate the stress associated with Arabic language use for religious purposes. Respondents described feeling increasingly comfortable reciting, understanding, and utilizing Arabic, with many reporting a newfound willingness to engage

directly in ritual and social interactions where Arabic was required. This reduction in anxiety contributed to a more meaningful and immersive spiritual experience.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research clearly demonstrate the transformative psychological impacts of Arabic language training for Malaysian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. The tailored language course not only elevated participants' comprehension and confidence in key ritual utterances and communicative scenarios but also fundamentally addressed core psychological factors tied to faith, motivation, and language anxiety.

First, the marked improvement in understanding and performing ritual phrases (*niat, doa, zikir*) affirms the deep linkage between faith-driven motivation and effective language acquisition. As pilgrims gained insight into the meanings behind these utterances, their spiritual motivation was both validated and amplified, turning linguistic mastery into an act of devotion rather than rote memorization. This intrinsic motivation acted as a powerful catalyst for continued engagement and perseverance in language learning, especially when confronted with linguistic challenges.

Second, the course's structured design—combining grammar instruction, practical exercises, and contextually relevant content—directly targeted and reduced language anxiety. Prior to the intervention, most participants reported significant apprehension and low self-efficacy regarding Arabic use during pilgrimages, potentially undermining both the spiritual atmosphere and the practical logistics of their ibadah. Post-course results revealed pronounced gains in self-assuredness and a substantial decrease in language-related stress, confirming that psychological barriers can be mitigated through supportive pedagogical strategies and clear alignment of language outcomes with personal religious objectives.

Finally, the observed boost in autonomy and confidence underscores the broader psychological benefit: by empowering pilgrims to interact and manage independently, the training not only improved ritual performance but also fostered a greater sense of agency, belonging, and fulfilment.

In sum, the Arabic language course module serves as a critical bridge connecting linguistic preparation with the psychological needs of Malaysian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. The integration of faith, motivation, and anxiety-reduction within the instructional framework created an environment where language became both a tool for effective worship and a means to deeper spiritual connection. The overwhelmingly positive feedback and demonstrable progress among participants highlight the profound role targeted language training can play in enhancing both the practical and emotional dimensions of the pilgrimage experience.

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