Strategic Utilization of Arabic Language Competencies of BSA Students for The Development of Tourism in Central Aceh

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes strategic models for utilizing the Arabic language competencies of students in the Arabic Language and Literature Program (BSA) to support tourism development in Central Aceh. Employing a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and content analysis of students' digital publications disseminated via the official social media platforms of the BSA Department at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The findings reveal two primary strategic domains: (1) digital marketing targeting Middle Eastern tourists and (2) educational tourism development through the "Language Village" model. Furthermore, institutional collaboration between the BSA Program and the Central Aceh Tourism Office facilitates sustainable synergy in training programs, cultural promotion, and applied research. The study contributes theoretically by extending Arabic language education into the socio-economic and cultural development framework and practically by offering an applicable strategic model for regional tourism policy. The novelty of this research lies in proposing an integrative model that systematically links students' Arabic language competencies with tourism development strategies in a local Islamic-cultural context.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis model strategis pemanfaatan kompetensi bahasa Arab mahasiswa Program Studi Bahasa dan Sastra Arab (BSA) untuk mendukung pengembangan pariwisata di Aceh Tengah. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif dan pendekatan studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, serta analisis konten terhadap publikasi digital mahasiswa yang disebarluaskan melalui platform media sosial resmi Jurusan BSA UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan dua domain strategis utama, yaitu: (1) pemasaran digital yang menyasar wisatawan dari negara-negara Timur Tengah dan (2) pengembangan wisata edukasi melalui model "Kampung Bahasa". Selain itu, kolaborasi kelembagaan antara Program Studi BSA dan Dinas Pariwisata Aceh Tengah terbukti mendorong terciptanya sinergi berkelanjutan dalam program pelatihan, promosi budaya, dan penelitian terapan. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan memperluas kajian pendidikan bahasa Arab ke dalam kerangka pengembangan sosial-ekonomi dan budaya, serta secara praktis menawarkan model strategis yang aplikatif bagi perumusan kebijakan pariwisata daerah. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pengajuan model integratif yang secara sistematis mengaitkan kompetensi bahasa Arab mahasiswa dengan strategi pengembangan pariwisata dalam konteks budaya Islam lokal.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector of Central Aceh holds significant potential to develop as a leading destination grounded in local culture and Islamic values. The natural beauty of Lake Laut Tawar, often referred to as the "Jewel of the Gayo Highlands," constitutes a major attraction for both domestic and international tourists. In addition, the local wisdom of the Gayo community, characterized by strong traditions of mutual cooperation and deep-rooted religious practices, provides distinctive cultural and spiritual value for visitors seeking meaningful tourism experiences (Soesilowati & Arsal, 2017). These combined natural and socio-cultural resources position Central Aceh as a promising destination within the growing global market of halal and Islamic cultural tourism.

Despite this substantial potential, Central Aceh continues to face considerable challenges, particularly in the area of multilingual tourism promotion. Current promotional strategies remain heavily dependent on Indonesian and English, while other strategically important languages most notably Arabic have yet to be systematically integrated. This limitation becomes increasingly significant when considering that tourists from Middle Eastern countries represent a highly promising market segment for Aceh. Historically, Aceh has maintained deep emotional, cultural, and religious ties with the Arab world through centuries of trade, Islamic education, and scholarly exchange during the era of the Aceh Sultanate (Marsuki et al., 2024). However, these historical connections have not been optimally translated into contemporary tourism communication strategies.

In this context, students of the Arabic Language and Literature Study Program (BSA) occupy a strategic position as potential linguistic and cultural mediators. Arabic proficiency should not be viewed merely as an academic outcome, but rather as a form of socio-economic capital capable of generating tangible benefits for regional tourism development. Through their linguistic competencies, BSA students can actively contribute to digital tourism marketing, tour guiding services, and cultural diplomacy initiatives, thereby strengthening the link between higher education and community-based economic development (Battour & Ismail, 2016). This perspective aligns with contemporary views that position language education as a driver of social transformation and sustainable development

Previous international studies on halal tourism and Islamic hospitality have largely concentrated on destination branding, tourist motivation, service quality, and market segmentation within Muslim-friendly tourism contexts (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Monica & Olimpia, 2020). While these studies provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and tourism management, they tend to marginalize the role of language as a strategic development resource. Meanwhile, research on language use in tourism communication predominantly emphasizes global languages such as English, Mandarin, or Spanish, often overlooking Arabic despite its critical importance in Islamic tourism markets. Furthermore, existing studies rarely conceptualize university students particularly those enrolled in Arabic language programs as active agents capable of integrating

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language education, digital promotion, and institutional collaboration within local tourism ecosystems.

This reveals a critical gap in the literature: the absence of an integrative framework that systematically connects Arabic language competencies, higher education institutions, and regional tourism development within an Islamic cultural context. Particularly in peripheral regions such as Central Aceh, empirical research that positions Arabic language students as strategic actors in tourism development remains scarce. Consequently, there is a pressing need for studies that not only explore the functional use of Arabic in tourism promotion but also conceptualize its broader socio-economic and cultural implications.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine: (1) how the Arabic language competencies of BSA students can be strategically utilized to support tourism development in Central Aceh, and (2) how institutional collaboration between the BSA Study Program and the Central Aceh Tourism Office can be optimized to generate sustainable synergy in promoting educational tourism and Islamic cultural tourism. By doing so, this research seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts of language use and instead propose a strategic, integrative model that embeds Arabic language education within a broader regional development agenda.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending the scope of Arabic language studies beyond pedagogical and linguistic dimensions into the domains of socio-economic development, cultural identity construction, and tourism policy. Practically, the study offers a context-sensitive strategic framework that can inform regional tourism planning and higher education policy, particularly in Muslim-majority and culturally rich regions. The novelty of this research is grounded in its formulation of an integrative model that positions Arabic language competencies as a pivotal driver of educational tourism and Islamic cultural tourism development, thereby bridging the gap between language education, institutional collaboration, and sustainable regional development.

2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach to explore strategic models for utilizing Arabic language competencies in tourism development. The research was conducted in Central Aceh Regency, focusing on the Arabic Language and Literature Study Program (BSA) of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh and the Central Aceh Tourism Office as key institutional stakeholders.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research objectives. A total of 15 informants participated in this study, comprising 4 BSA lecturers, 7 BSA students actively engaged in tourism-related activities and digital promotion, and 4 officials from the Central Aceh Tourism Office responsible for tourism planning and promotion. This diversity of roles and experiences enabled a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon from academic, student, and policy perspectives.

Data collection techniques included in-depth semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The interview guide was developed to explore three core dimensions: (1) perceptions of the role of Arabic language competencies in tourism development,

(2) practical forms of Arabic language utilization in digital promotion and educational tourism, and (3) patterns of institutional collaboration between the BSA Study Program and the Tourism Office. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and transcribed verbatim to ensure analytical rigor.

Participatory observations were conducted during academic and tourism-related activities involving BSA students, including training programs, tourism promotion events, and educational tourism initiatives. Observations focused on students' use of Arabic in communicative interactions, the production of promotional content, and engagement with tourism stakeholders. Field notes and reflective journals were employed to systematically document observational data.

Document analysis encompassed digital content published on the official social media platforms of the BSA Study Program, including promotional videos, posters, and written narratives in Arabic. These materials were analyzed to identify patterns of language use, thematic representations of tourism, and cultural and religious messaging embedded in the content.

Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed throughout the research process. All participants were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose, procedures, and potential implications of the study prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained in written or recorded form, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms and coded identifiers were applied in data presentation and reporting.

Data validity was ensured through methodological and source triangulation, integrating insights from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). This iterative process enabled systematic pattern identification, thematic categorization, and analytical interpretation to generate credible and robust findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) Strategic Utilization of Arabic Language Skills in Digital Tourism Marketing

The findings demonstrate that BSA students possess significant potential to strengthen digital tourism marketing strategies for Central Aceh through Arabic-language content production. The use of Arabic in digital media such as articles, short videos, and social media narratives extends promotional reach to Middle Eastern audiences and positions Arabic not merely as a communicative instrument but as a strategic cultural-symbolic resource.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns with the concept of language as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991), where linguistic competence functions as a form of symbolic power that enables access to specific socio-economic markets. In this context, Arabic proficiency operates as a form of tourism-linguistic capital, allowing Central Aceh to access the Middle Eastern tourism market more effectively than conventional English-based promotion. This supports recent studies emphasizing the strategic role of culturally embedded languages in niche tourism markets rather than global lingua francas alone (Namira et al., 2024; Statistik, 2024).

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Furthermore, Arabic-based tourism promotion functions as a form of digital cultural diplomacy, where language becomes a medium for transmitting Islamic values, hospitality ethics, and cultural identity (Alfurayh, 2025). This reflects the soft power framework in tourism studies, which conceptualizes tourism promotion as a cultural influence strategy rather than mere economic marketing. Thus, student-generated Arabic content is not only promotional material but also a form of identity representation and symbolic positioning of Aceh within the Islamic tourism network.

The integration of student-produced content into official tourism campaigns also illustrates a co-production model between academia and government, consistent with participatory governance theories in tourism development. This synergy transforms students from passive learners into active development actors, reinforcing the concept of university-based social innovation in regional development.

b) Educational Tourism and the *Language Village* Model as Experiential Learning

The "Language Village" initiative represents a practical embodiment of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), where knowledge is constructed through direct social practice. By integrating Arabic learning with cultural activities such as calligraphy workshops, religious tourism, and cultural interaction this model transforms linguistic education into an immersive socio-cultural experience.

From a tourism theory perspective, this model aligns with experience economy theory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)), where tourism value is generated not only through services but through meaningful experiences. The "Language Village" does not offer tourism as consumption, but as participatory cultural engagement, positioning Central Aceh as a site of Islamic educational tourism rather than mass tourism.

Academically, this model contributes to applied linguistics in tourism, extending language learning beyond classrooms into community-based learning spaces. It reframes BSA students as knowledge brokers who mediate between academic knowledge and social practice, supporting contemporary models of community-based tourism (CBT) and educational tourism ecosystems (Nahdiyati & Yusdalifa, 2025; Purbasari et al., 2021).

This confirms that Arabic competence is not only pedagogical capital but also productive socio-economic capital, capable of generating sustainable community-based tourism structures.

c) Institutional Collaboration within the Triple Helix Framework

The collaboration potential between the BSA Study Program and the Central Aceh Tourism Office reflects the Triple Helix Model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), which conceptualizes development as the interaction between academia, government, and society.

However, this study extends the Triple Helix model by introducing language competence as a central mediating variable, not merely as a supporting factor. Unlike conventional models that prioritize technology and innovation, this research positions linguistic capital as the primary development driver, thereby offering a conceptual expansion of the Triple Helix framework into cultural-linguistic development models.

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Institutional collaboration here is not administrative but epistemic and functional, where universities contribute symbolic resources (language, culture, knowledge) and governments provide structural support (policy, legitimacy, infrastructure). This creates a hybrid governance model in tourism development that integrates education, culture, and policy.

d) Structural Challenges and Sustainability Logic

Despite strong potential, several challenges were identified. First, administrative challenges, including bureaucratic differences and institutional priorities, often hinder smooth collaboration (Kolb, 1984). Second, there remains a shortage of human resources who possess both strong linguistic and digital competencies.

Proposed solutions include developing cross-disciplinary collaborative programs involving students of information technology, communication, and creative economy to support BSA students in producing tourism content. Program sustainability may also be strengthened through research grants, community engagement funding, and active involvement of local communities as partners (Hafid et al., 2025).

Standardized competency requirements for Arabic-speaking tour guides should also be developed through joint certification between universities and the Tourism Office so that local human resources are globally competitive (Jumadi & Nur Adhifa, 2025).

e) Implications for the BSA Study Program

This study has direct implications for the development of the BSA Study Program. First, the findings highlight the need for curriculum reorientation to align with tourism industry demands. Courses such as Arabic for Tourism and Digital Arabic Communication could broaden students' competencies (Anwar, 2024).

Second, students' digital publications on the Study Program's social media platforms demonstrate a practical form of project-based learning. Arabic content uploaded by students enhances the program's digital branding as a center of Islamic cultural diplomacy (Menchenko & Javed, 2024).

Additionally, such publications serve as academic portfolios, showcasing the synergy between academic learning and social contribution. Student engagement in digital tourism promotion demonstrates that the BSA Study Program may function as both an educational institution and a cultural content producer.

f) Implications for the Local Tourism Sector

For the local tourism sector, this study emphasizes the importance of optimizing Arabic as a cultural and economic asset. With the growing interest of Middle Eastern tourists in Islamic tourism in Southeast Asia, Central Aceh may position itself as an Arab-friendly destination integrating religious and cultural attractions.

Arabic language skills can create new employment opportunities in tourism, such as tour guides, translators, and digital marketers. This strengthens a language-based creative

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economy and expands the role of academics in local economic development (Hafid et al., 2025).

Culturally, the use of Arabic reinforces Aceh's image as a religious region welcoming to Muslim tourists. Arabic serves as a symbol of shared values between locals and tourists, as well as an effective tool of cultural diplomacy (Batmang et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Arabic language competencies constitute a strategic asset in advancing tourism development in Central Aceh, functioning not only as a medium of global communication but also as a symbolic and cultural resource embedded in Islamic identity. The findings demonstrate that BSA students can play an active and transformative role in two key domains: Arabic-based digital tourism promotion and the development of culture-oriented educational tourism through the "Language Village" model.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the expansion of Arabic language education and tourism studies by conceptualizing Arabic proficiency as a form of socio-economic and cultural capital within regional development frameworks. By integrating applied linguistics, tourism development theory, and institutional collaboration models, this research advances an interdisciplinary perspective that positions language competence as a central driver of sustainable, value-based tourism development.

Practically, the findings have important implications for the curriculum development of the BSA Study Program. They highlight the urgency of reorienting the curriculum toward industry-responsive competencies through the introduction of courses such as Arabic for Tourism, Digital Arabic Communication, and project-based learning models that integrate digital content production and community engagement. Such curricular innovations are expected to enhance students' employability, entrepreneurial capacity, and social contribution. Furthermore, the results offer policy-relevant insights for regional tourism governance, particularly in designing Arabic-based promotional strategies, developing educational tourism programs, and institutionalizing university–government partnerships as part of sustainable tourism planning.

For local policymakers, this study underscores the necessity of incorporating Arabic language strategies into regional tourism development policies, particularly in targeting Middle Eastern markets and strengthening Aceh's branding as a leading destination for Islamic cultural and educational tourism. Institutional support, funding mechanisms, and joint certification programs for Arabic-speaking tourism professionals are crucial to ensure long-term sustainability.

Regarding future research, further studies are recommended to employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches to measure the economic impact of Arabic-based tourism promotion and educational tourism initiatives. Comparative studies across different regions in Indonesia and Southeast Asia would also be valuable in validating and refining the proposed integrative model. Additionally, future research may explore the perspectives of Middle Eastern tourists to assess the effectiveness of Arabic-language promotional strategies and their influence on travel motivation and destination loyalty.

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