



The Relationship between Vocabulary Mastery and Self-Confidence among Students in an Intensive Arabic Program: A Correlational Study at Markaz Arabiyah Pare

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study examines the relationship between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence among students in an intensive Arabic learning program at Markaz Arabiyah Pare. Speaking performance was not measured; no claim is made regarding either variable's effect on oral production outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach - A quantitative correlational design was employed with 25 students from the *I'dad Awal A* class selected through purposive sampling. Two instruments were used: a vocabulary mastery test (10 valid items; $\alpha = 0.828$) and a self-confidence questionnaire (16 valid statements; $\alpha = 0.791$), both validated through expert review and SPSS-based item analysis. Shapiro-Wilk normality testing led to the use of Spearman's rho for correlation analysis.

Findings/results - A statistically significant moderate positive correlation was found between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence ($r_s = 0.444$, $p = 0.026$, $r^2 = 0.197$). Descriptive statistics revealed a wide vocabulary score distribution ($M = 50.00$, $SD = 30.14$, $Mdn = 40$, $IQR = 60$) against a considerably narrower self-confidence distribution ($M = 56.52$, $SD = 6.10$, $Mdn = 56$, $IQR = 7$). Vocabulary mastery accounted for approximately 19.7% of the variance in self-confidence scores.

Originality/value - This study is among the first to directly examine the relationship between linguistic readiness (vocabulary mastery) and affective readiness (self-confidence) within an intensive Arabic learning institution in Indonesia. Rather than treating the two variables as independent predictors of speaking performance, it investigates their direct interrelationship—a question underexplored in Arabic language acquisition research.

Paper type - Research paper

Keywords: Vocabulary mastery; Self-Confidence; Affective readiness; Linguistic readiness.

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1. Introduction

Learning Arabic in an intensive program demands more than accumulating grammar rules or memorizing verb conjugations. Students at institutions like Markaz Arabiyah Pare are expected to use Arabic actively every day—in class discussions, informal conversations, and structured practice sessions. Two resources matter especially in this environment: the vocabulary students can draw on, and the confidence they carry as Arabic users. Without the first, constructing meaningful utterances is difficult. Without the second, even learners with solid vocabulary may fall silent when the moment to communicate arrives.

Brown (2001) describes foreign language speaking as governed by three interacting principles: cognitive, affective, and linguistic. The affective principle—which encompasses self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety—determines whether learners are psychologically willing to engage with the language at all (Botes et al., 2020; Calafato, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). The linguistic principle concerns the structural resources learners possess, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Both dimensions are present in every communicative act, but research has rarely examined how they relate to each other directly—only how each separately predicts speaking outcomes.

Vocabulary mastery has a theoretically plausible connection to self-confidence through Bandura's self-efficacy framework. Nation (2013) describes vocabulary breadth as a prerequisite for spontaneous language production; Machmudah and Rosyidi (2016) link it to students' capacity to express ideas with variety and fluency. Bandura, Freeman, and Lightsey (1999) argue that mastery experiences—successful performances in a given domain—are the most powerful source of self-efficacy beliefs. Students who repeatedly succeed at vocabulary-dependent communication tasks may accumulate experiences that gradually strengthen their confidence as Arabic users. Knowing words may not just enable speech; it may make students feel ready to attempt it.

Observations conducted in November 2025 in the *l'dad Awwal* A class at Markaz Arabiyah Pare illustrated this tension concretely. Some students with relatively wide vocabulary showed visible hesitation before responding—pausing, self-interrupting, or declining to volunteer. Others with narrower vocabulary participated more readily, relying on a limited but familiar set of expressions. The pattern was not uniform, and the relationship between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence appeared neither straightforward nor automatic. That observation motivated the present study.

This study does not measure speaking performance. What it asks is narrower: are students' vocabulary scores systematically associated with their self-reported confidence as Arabic users? Speaking is widely recognized as the most socially exposed of the four language skills (Al-Nāqah, 1985; Naimah & Syafi'i, 2025; Richards, 2008), and both vocabulary and confidence are understood to bear on it—but whether the two variables are themselves related has not been examined in an intensive Arabic program context. Based on this background, the null hypothesis holds that there is no significant relationship between the two variables; the

alternative hypothesis holds that a significant positive relationship exists. Two research questions guide this study:

Three research questions guide this study:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence among students in the I'dad Awal A class at Markaz Arabiyah Pare?

RQ2: How strong is the association between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence in an intensive Arabic learning program context?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vocabulary Mastery as a Linguistic Foundation in Arabic Learning

Vocabulary mastery is broadly understood as a foundational component of language competence. Tu'aymah (1989) defines it as the ability to understand and use words correctly in appropriate contexts, encompassing both receptive knowledge—recognizing word meaning—and productive use—deploying words in communication. Nation (2013) further argues that vocabulary breadth directly determines a learner's capacity to construct utterances spontaneously, positioning it as a prerequisite for fluent oral interaction rather than a merely supplementary resource. Without adequate vocabulary, learners cannot formulate responses, sustain conversations, or engage meaningfully with input—regardless of how motivated or confident they feel.

In the context of Arabic learning, vocabulary knowledge enables students to comprehend input, formulate responses, and sustain conversations across both academic and social registers. These functions are especially visible in intensive programs where Arabic serves as the primary medium of daily interaction (Arifah et al., 2025; Machmudah & Rosyidi, 2016; Oktafia et al., 2023). At Markaz Arabiyah Pare, where students are expected to use Arabic from the first day of enrollment, vocabulary coverage becomes an immediate practical concern rather than a deferred goal.

2.2 Self-Confidence as Affective Readiness in Foreign Language Use

Self-confidence in language learning refers to a learner's belief in their own communicative competence and their willingness to take risks in language use in front of others. Ghufroon and Risnawati (2011) identify three core dimensions: belief in one's own abilities, optimism toward future performance, and the capacity for realistic self-assessment. In foreign language contexts, learners with higher self-confidence tend to participate more actively, tolerate errors more readily, and persist longer in communicative tasks (Aprilia Afifah et al., 2022; Kuncoro et al., 2021). Conversely, low self-confidence can suppress language use even when the learner possesses the necessary linguistic resources.

In an intensive Arabic environment, self-confidence carries particular weight because communicative demands are constant. Students who doubt their ability to construct correct or comprehensible sentences may avoid participation, choose simpler expressions, or defer to more confident peers—behaviors that limit both practice opportunities and the feedback loops needed for further development. Jannah and Roidah (2025) and Wulandari, Garzita, and



Nasution (2025) have documented the relationship between affective variables and Arabic oral skill in Indonesian learning contexts, reinforcing the relevance of confidence as a meaningful dimension of learner readiness.

2.3 Theoretical Framework : Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

The theoretical relationship between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence is grounded in Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their capacity to perform a specific task—is shaped primarily by mastery experiences: successful completions of tasks within a relevant domain (Bandura et al., 1999). In language learning, successfully using vocabulary to communicate in Arabic constitutes such a mastery experience. Each successful deployment reinforces the learner's belief that they can communicate, gradually building what Bandura calls communicative self-efficacy.

This mechanism suggests that vocabulary mastery does not merely function as a linguistic tool. It may also operate as a psychological foundation for affective readiness in communication. A student who finds the right word in conversation, or who completes a vocabulary task correctly, experiences a concrete confirmation of their ability as an Arabic user. Over time, those confirmations may accumulate into a more stable sense of communicative confidence—one that persists across communicative situations, not just the tasks where vocabulary was first successfully used. This is the theoretical bridge between the two variables that this study examines.

2.4 Prior Research, Identified Gap, and Study Rationale

Previous research has examined vocabulary mastery and self-confidence primarily as separate predictors of speaking performance. Mega (2018) found that both vocabulary mastery and self-confidence contributed positively to students' oral scores. Harisa (2021) similarly reported that EFL students with larger vocabulary and stronger confidence tended to demonstrate better speaking ability. Lestari (2022) found a strong relationship between self-confidence and Arabic conversation practice among students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Aola (2023) examined the effect of vocabulary memorization on speaking ability at a boarding school in Brebes, and Riska, Bakhtiyar, and Mansuri (2023) explored vocabulary mastery in relation to reading comprehension at the secondary level in Makassar.

These studies establish that vocabulary and confidence are each meaningfully associated with language performance outcomes. What remains less examined is the direct relationship between the two variables themselves, independent of how each relates to a third outcome variable. If vocabulary mastery and self-confidence co-vary, that has implications for how researchers design learner-readiness studies and how practitioners understand the relationship between linguistic and affective development in Arabic language programs.

The Arabic learning context also remains underrepresented in this literature. Most correlational work involving vocabulary and affective variables has been conducted in English as a Foreign Language environments, where institutional structures, daily language exposure, and learner profiles differ substantially from those of intensive Arabic programs in Indonesia. Institutions in Pare operate on full-immersion principles, requiring Arabic use in daily

interaction from the first day—creating conditions where both vocabulary demands and confidence pressures are active simultaneously. The specific relationship between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence within such an environment has not been examined empirically. This study addresses that gap.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the strength and direction of the association between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence, without imposing experimental conditions (Sugiyono, 2013). The correlational design was chosen because the study aims to identify whether and to what degree the two variables are related, not to test the effect of any intervention. The research site was Markaz Arabiyah Pare, an intensive Arabic learning institution in East Java, Indonesia, where students are required to use Arabic actively in both academic and social contexts throughout their enrollment.

Participants were 25 students from the 86th batch of the I'dad Awal A class, selected through purposive sampling. This class was chosen because its students had already developed foundational vocabulary knowledge and had practical experience with structured Arabic speaking activities, generating the range of scores on both instruments necessary for a meaningful correlation analysis. Data were collected from January 23 to February 2, 2026, via Google Forms. Brief structured interviews with the program's general manager and several students supplemented the quantitative data with contextual information about classroom practices.

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used. The vocabulary mastery test was initially developed with 30 items across four item types: sentence completion, synonym and antonym identification, word meaning recognition, and picture-based vocabulary identification, following the typology proposed by Tu'aymah (1989) and constructed from I'dad Awal A curriculum materials. The self-confidence questionnaire originally contained 20 statements organized around three indicators from Ghufroon and Risnawati (2011)—belief in one's own abilities, optimism, and realistic self-assessment—developed with reference to Plutchik's (1988) Wheel of Emotion. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale with both favorable and unfavorable statements; reverse scoring was applied to unfavorable items to maintain directional consistency. Table 1 presents the complete instrument blueprint.

Table 1. Instrument Blueprint: Vocabulary Mastery Test and Self-Confidence Questionnaire

Instrument	Dimension / Indicator	Item Type	Items (Initial)	Items (Valid)
Vocabulary Mastery Test	Sentence completion	Objective	8	3
	Synonym & antonym identification	Objective	8	3



	Word meaning recognition	Objective	8	2
	Picture-based vocabulary identification	Objective	6	2
	Total		30	10
Self-Confidence Questionnaire	Belief in own abilities	Likert 1-5	8	6
	Optimism	Likert 1-5	6	5
	Realistic self-assessment	Likert 1-5	6	5
	Total		20	16

Both instruments underwent content validity testing by expert reviewers and statistical validity testing using SPSS. After validation, 10 vocabulary items and 16 self-confidence statements met validity criteria and were retained for analysis. Reliability testing produced a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.828 for the vocabulary instrument, indicating high reliability, and 0.791 for the self-confidence questionnaire, indicating adequate reliability.

3.3 Data Analysis

Prior to correlation analysis, normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is appropriate for samples below 50 participants (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012; Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). Because vocabulary mastery scores were not normally distributed, Spearman's rho was applied as a nonparametric alternative to Pearson's r (Priyatno, 2013). Descriptive statistics—including mean, standard deviation, median, and interquartile range—were computed for both variables to characterize the distributions before correlation testing.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents summary descriptive statistics for both variables. Vocabulary mastery scores showed considerably greater dispersion than self-confidence scores, reflecting heterogeneous preparation levels among students.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Vocabulary Mastery and Self-Confidence

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median	IQR
Vocabulary Mastery	25	10	100	50.00	30.14	40.00	60.00
Self-Confidence	25	44	69	56.52	6.10	56.00	7.00

The mean vocabulary score of 50.00 (SD = 30.14, Mdn = 40, IQR = 60) places the group mean within the fair classification band (26–50), though the wide score range—from 10 to 100—signals highly heterogeneous preparation. The median of 40 falls in the fair band, and the interquartile range of 60 points (Q1 = 20, Q3 = 80) confirms that the middle 50% of students spanned nearly the full scale, indicating substantial variation in vocabulary coverage within a

single class. Self-confidence averaged 56.52 (SD = 6.10, Mdn = 56, IQR = 7), falling in the good classification band (41–60). The narrow spread here is striking by comparison: most students clustered within a 7-point range around the median, suggesting that daily immersive Arabic use at Markaz Arabiyah may sustain a relatively uniform baseline of communicative confidence regardless of individual vocabulary levels.

4.2 Score Distribution across Classification Bands

Table 3 summarizes score distributions across four classification bands for each variable.

Table 3. *Category Distribution of Vocabulary Mastery and Self-Confidence Scores*

Category	Vocab Score Range	Vocab (n)	Conf. Score Range	Conf. (n)
Poor / Low	1–25	8	1–20	0
Fair / Moderate	26–50	6	21–40	0
Good	51–75	3	41–60	19
Very Good	76–100	8	61–80	6
Total		25		25

Vocabulary scores distributed across all four bands, with equal numbers at the extremes: 8 students in the poor band and 8 in the very good band. Self-confidence scores, by contrast, fell entirely within the good and very good ranges; no student scored in the low or moderate categories. This divergence between the two distributions is worth pausing on. Students with the weakest vocabulary did not automatically report the lowest confidence, which indicates that self-confidence in this context is shaped by more than vocabulary level alone. The immersive daily communicative routine at Markaz Arabiyah—where participation is expected regardless of fluency—may support a baseline confidence that persists even when vocabulary coverage remains limited.

4.3 Normality Testing and Selection of Statistical Procedure

Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test before proceeding to correlation analysis. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4. *Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test Results*

Variable	Statistic (W)	df	Sig.	Distribution
Vocabulary Mastery	0.890	25	0.011	Not normal
Self-Confidence	0.989	25	0.991	Normal

Vocabulary mastery scores were not normally distributed ($W = 0.890, p = 0.011, < 0.05$), while self-confidence scores met the normality assumption ($W = 0.989, p = 0.991$). The departure from normality in one variable ruled out Pearson’s r ; Spearman’s ρ was therefore applied throughout the correlation analysis.



4.4 Correlation Results, Theoretical Interpretation, and Practical Implications

The Spearman correlation coefficient was $r_s = 0.444$ ($p = 0.026$), confirming a statistically significant moderate positive association between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence. Students with higher vocabulary scores tended to report higher self-confidence. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.197$) indicates that vocabulary mastery is associated with approximately 19.7% of the variance in self-confidence scores within this sample.

Table 5. Spearman's Rho Correlation: Vocabulary Mastery and Self-Confidence

Variable Pair	r_s	p-value	r^2	Interpretation
Vocabulary Mastery – Self-Confidence	0.444	0.026	0.197	Moderate positive, significant

This finding should not be read as evidence that vocabulary mastery causes self-confidence to increase, or the reverse. The correlational design permits no directional inference. What the data show is that the two variables co-vary at a moderate level—a meaningful association, but not a dominant one. The remaining 80.3% of variance in self-confidence reflects the contribution of factors not captured here: communication experience, language anxiety, classroom climate, teacher feedback style, and individual personality characteristics (Jenita, 2021; Murtadho et al., 2025; Rahman, 2022; Syamsu, 2022).

Bandura's self-efficacy framework helps explain why a positive association would exist at all. Students who successfully deploy vocabulary in daily Arabic interactions at Markaz Arabiyah accumulate mastery experiences that may gradually strengthen their belief in their own communicative competence (Bandura et al., 1999). Arabic use is structurally required throughout the day, so vocabulary-based successes occur regularly and have immediate social consequences. A student who finds the right word in a conversation, or who completes a vocabulary task correctly, experiences a concrete confirmation of their ability as an Arabic user. Over time, those confirmations may accumulate into a more stable sense of communicative confidence—which is exactly what the self-confidence questionnaire measures.

The interview with the program's general manager was consistent with this account. Students with broader vocabulary were generally described as appearing more prepared and more willing to engage verbally in learning activities. Students with limited vocabulary more often showed hesitation or relied on a narrow set of fixed expressions. These are observational impressions rather than measured outcomes, but they align with the direction and moderate strength of the quantitative finding.

The moderate correlation strength—rather than weak or strong—carries a practical implication. Vocabulary mastery is a meaningful correlate of self-confidence in this context, but not the primary determinant. Expanding students' vocabulary may support confidence development, but only when vocabulary learning is embedded in communicative practice that gives students real opportunities to use new words in interaction. A student who can identify correct answers on a vocabulary test but rarely attempts to use those words in conversation

may not generate the mastery experiences needed to build sustained confidence. The link between knowing and feeling ready to use is not automatic; it depends on whether the learning environment creates conditions for that gap to close.

These findings align with prior research. Mega (2018) and Harisa (2021) both documented positive relationships between vocabulary and affective language learning outcomes. The current study extends their work by examining the direct vocabulary–confidence relationship rather than their joint contribution to speaking performance, and by situating the question in an intensive Arabic program that neither previous study examined. The moderate correlation is consistent with their findings while offering a context-specific data point from a pedagogical environment where daily immersive use simultaneously demands both vocabulary and confidence from learners.

5. Conclusion

This study found a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between vocabulary mastery and self-confidence among students at Markaz Arabiyah Pare ($r_s = 0.444$, $p = 0.026$, $r^2 = 0.197$). Vocabulary mastery is moderately associated with students' self-confidence in an intensive Arabic learning context, accounting for approximately 19.7% of its variance. No causal claim is warranted from the correlational design, and speaking performance was not measured. The findings address a gap in Arabic language learning research by documenting the direct relationship between linguistic readiness and affective readiness in an intensive program context—a framing that has received limited empirical attention.

The practical implication is specific: vocabulary instruction in intensive Arabic programs should not be treated as a purely cognitive exercise isolated from communicative practice. When vocabulary learning is embedded in genuine interaction—where students repeatedly attempt to use new words in real Arabic exchanges—it generates the kind of mastery experiences that may support confidence development alongside linguistic growth. Pedagogical designs that create regular, low-stakes communicative opportunities are likely to serve both dimensions simultaneously. Theoretically, the findings support the position that linguistic readiness and affective readiness are related but non-redundant dimensions of learner preparation; developing one does not automatically produce the other, but they tend to move together in environments that actively engage both.

Three limitations bear on the interpretation of these findings. First, the sample was small ($n = 25$) and drawn from a single class at one institution. The moderate correlation and 19.7% explained variance should be read with appropriate caution, and the findings should not be generalized beyond comparable intensive Arabic program settings without further study. Second, the correlational design cannot establish the direction of the relationship. Whether vocabulary mastery supports self-confidence, whether confidence motivates vocabulary engagement, or whether a third variable—such as general language aptitude or prior exposure—drives both, cannot be determined from these data. Third, the self-confidence questionnaire captures students' perceptions of their own confidence at a single time point and



may not fully reflect how students actually behave in live communicative situations. Longitudinal or observational designs would provide a richer account of how vocabulary mastery and self-confidence develop and interact over the course of an intensive program.

Future research should move beyond correlational designs. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could test whether vocabulary-integrated communicative instruction produces measurable gains in self-confidence. Studies incorporating additional variables—language anxiety, interaction frequency, teacher feedback style—would clarify the broader network of factors shaping self-confidence in intensive Arabic programs. Larger samples and multi-institutional comparisons would strengthen the generalizability of findings from this context-specific study, and longitudinal designs would allow researchers to track how the vocabulary–confidence relationship develops over the full arc of an intensive program.

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