

The role of the languages during the era of technology

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1. Introduction

Language is central in all our lives. Abdul Moghni (1997, P. 21) puts it well when he says “*language is the medium through which all the messages of life are conveyed*”. In the age of global communication and information technology, there are several languages, particularly Arabic, English, and Japanese, which are being widely used in the new global communication. The Arabic language is spoken in most countries in the world, which qualifies it as a language with major international repute.

People study Arabic for many different reasons; for business, for tourism and as the language of Islam, a major religion. Learners and students face problems in learning Arabic because of, for example, less than suitable curriculums and shortages of teaching aids. Moreover, learners’ attitude toward the language is a main factor and should be considered important. We have to encourage students to get involved in Arabic dialogues with native speakers and listen to the television and radio as well as using computers and the Internet to improve their language skills.

The intention of this study is to highlight the problems faced by those learning Arabic and offer solutions for those problems inherent in the learning of the Arabic language. The development of suitable Arabic language materials as well as the use of state of the art technology in learning will be discussed.

2. Why Learn Arabic?

There are many and various reasons for learning Arabic.

2.1. *Arabic culture.*

In order to understand Arabic culture completely, we need to learn Arabic enabling us to thorough study Arabic reference book, and journals, such as *AL- Arabi* journal published in Kuwait. We may need to know about marriage customs, festivals, gatherings, performances, dance, food, traditional clothes and many more.

2.2 *Business.*

As we know Arab countries are very rich in oil; two thirds of the world’s oil comes from Arab countries. In addition, there are significant imports and exports to and from Arab countries. Companies and individuals who need to do business with Arab countries, particularly in the oil and other sectors, have to know standard Arabic to enable them to deal with their client’s banks and other sectors in Arab countries.

2.3 *Tourism.*

If you plan to visit any country in the world, you need to know its native language. Why do you need to know their language? Because we may assume that you need to deal with people there, for example to eat, to drink, to travel and to enjoy yourself. Hence, you should learn the local language. Imagine trying to find accommodation when you don’t know a single word of the local language, then how would you communicate with the local inhabitants? Therefore, if you intend to visit Arab countries you need to learn Arabic.

2.4 Working in Arab countries.

Many people work in Arab countries, in different fields, because of their wealth, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Sudan, and others countries. Therefore, in order to stay in Arab countries you need to know Arabic to assist you in both your daily life as well as in the work place, be it in a university, a company or the private sector.

2.5 Accessing Arabic Media

Learners and students from all over the world, whether studying in Arab countries or in their homeland have to know standard Arabic in order to have access to Arabic media, TV, radio and newspapers. Some learners come to Arab countries to study religion and history and therefore they have to know standard Arabic language, besides those who are interested to study about Middle East culture will need to know more and more from the Arabic references and resources. Thus, in order to understand effectively, they need to learn standard Arabic.

2.6 Security.

Security is a very important issue these days. In order to protect our country from any internal or external problems that might occur, we need to learn foreign languages; to understand others people's cultures and learn how to deal with them perfectly, particularly in critical situations.

3. The Study Design

3.1. The Objectives of the Study

This study was designed to document the reasons why people learn Arabic.

3.2 The Population and the Study Sample

3.2.1. Population

The population for this study comprised of adults who enrolled in Arabic night classes at the Faculty of Medicine, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The total number of learners enrolled in the various classes of the program was 20.

In addition the researcher posted the same questionnaire on "LINGUIST SERV" and "ARABIC SERV" as well as sending it to some scholars and he received responses from Japan, Australia, America and other countries.

3.2.2 The Study Sample

Sample One consisted of all 20 individuals enrolled in Arabic night classes at the Faculty of Medicine, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The study sample was due to small number of the population.

Sample Two consisted of respondents replying via the Internet.

3.2.3 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of open questions and included seven items. It was designed to give the researcher an insight into the students' perceptions of various aspects of the role of the Arabic as a Foreign Language.

Validity of the Questionnaire

The researcher submitted the draft of his questionnaire to a group of senior scholars in order to seek their opinion and advice concerning its content validity, especially in terms of its language accuracy, and the need to add or omit questions and/or phases within questions.

Questionnaire:

Here are the reasons being stated by the samples for the question: Why are you studying Arabic?

- 1- To perform and practice my religion
- 2- For tourism
- 3- To learn about another culture
- 4- For business
- 5- To work in another country
- 6- For security reasons
- 7- To communicate with others

Please put them in order and you may add any others reasons and any suggestions

3.3 Results

Table No.1 Sample 1 responses

The reasons	Numbers of the learners	Percentages
To perform and practice my religion	20	100%
To learn about another culture	18	90 %
To communicate with others	14	70 %
For business	10	50 %
For tourism	8	40 %
To work in another country	6	30 %
For security reasons	2	10 %

As shown above, 100 % of the participants study Arabic in order to perform and practice their religion, while 90 % of them study Arabic to learn about another culture. 70 % of the participants study Arabic to enable them to communicate with others and 50 % of them study Arabic for business. Interestingly only 40 % of them study Arabic for tourism and less than that (only 30 %) study Arabic to enable them to work in an Arabic speaking country. Only 10 % study Arabic for security reasons.

Here are some of the reasons stated by the above participants: "to know deeper about my religion, to understand al-Quran and Hadith and to read old Arabic books and to spread our religion". Interestingly many learners wanted to be multi-lingual. 30 % of the participants declared that "I want to be a lecturer for Arabic Language". "I love to know about other cultures and languages." "To achieve my ambition." "I want to teach my parents and my family about Arabic." "I don't want to waste my holiday time and I want to fill it with some good activities." "To further my study in Islamic and *Usuluddin* and to study for "self satisfaction as a Muslim." Some learners study now because they "did not have the chance before." "To adopt better society." "I am interested to know about various languages." "To write letters to my friends." "To correct mistakes." "To understand Arabic Language, because some of my family can speak Arabic." "To do business with Arabic countries." "I have relatives in *Hadramout* and *Sudi Arabia*." "To teach my family to understand Arabic." "To understand the news on the Internet." "To learn about Arabic culture." Here are some suggestions from the learners e.g. Do online classes where student can study it when they are online. Give some *Surah in Al-Quran* and try to translate it. Produce a book in Arabic for student references. And herewith the scholars (10) comments to the same questions:

Table No.2 Sample 2 responses

The reasons	Numbers of the scholars	Percentages
to communicate with others	08	80%
to learn about another culture	08	80 %
for tourism	06	60 %
working in other countries	04	40 %

Besides the above reasons the researcher received very interesting comments from the scholars: "I have always been fascinated with language for their own sake." "The demand from the community. Employment opportunities." "I study Arabic to exchange true information. I welcome more complete information that is not found in the western new media. I would like to learn about Arab schools, weddings, food and the daily lives of typical families" "History, Islam." "I have almost daily contact with Arabs in chat rooms on the internet. These chat rooms support foreign alphabets, allowing me to be corrected when typing vocabulary words, grammar, and syntax. That bring the language to life, the help is available always anywhere with portable laptop, and is more interesting than commercial CDs for languages study (which are not bad). The Internet gives me the impression of close contact with native speakers and their families and friends." Here are the suggestions from the scholars: Lists of email address (perhaps on some website) of ordinary people willing to exchange ideas, descriptions of people and life and society and help with their native languages and understanding their way of life. Learns need to learn more about technical or professional information (please compare table No.2 with table No.1)

4. Problems when learning Arabic

There are many problems usually faced by non-Arabic learners. Below are some of those problems.

4.1. Learners' attitudes.

Is the learner an adult or a child? Learners' ages have to be considered as important as well as learner's gender e.g., male or female. In addition to that learner's attitudes should also be considered during the learning process. This may affect their performance as Ahmed (2002 a) and Dickensen (1991) have reported that: "*Most of the students who have positive attitudes towards language gained high scores in their competition.*"

4.2. Teacher's attitudes.

This is an important factor. If the teacher himself is not qualified to teach Arabic this will lead students to refrain from the Arabic language. Beside this, if the teacher has negative attitudes towards Arabic culture and language, we may assume that this will badly affect his students also. Beside that, we may not expect that the teacher will present any useful knowledge to his students Ellis. (1985).

4.3. Arabic Language Curriculum.

Language is the medium through which all the messages of life are being conveyed (Abdul Moghni, 1997, P. 21). *Al-Sigil allemi* has emphasized the selection of simple sentences and topics, which relate to the community's life. The materials selected should have sufficient number of vocabulary and different structural patterns.

The content's writer has to conduct a detailed survey of the target students' about their cultural patterns, religious and traditional habits, the political system and social system., attributes of their daily life such as clothes, food, housing, their agriculture and technological sophistication. The designer has to compare the learners' culture with the Arabic culture too.

4.4. Environment.

The environment is very important for language learning, in order for the learner, to practice Arabic language and for him to talk. Therefore, he needs to practice Arabic language and would be grateful if we encourage our scholars as well as our learners to join Arabic language universities and schools of Arabic language to practice Arabic conversation.

4.5 Teaching Aids

We need to use teaching aids such as Arabic television programmes, Arabic radio and television (ART) channel. A teacher may use videotape such as "*Iftah Ya Simsim*" Programme, "*Salah Al-deen*" and "*Algadsiya*". At the present time teachers may use computers because of the power, such as sound, images, video, and feedback (Ahmed, 2001, Ahmed, 2002 a). The internet is a very important media for developing language skills Warschauer, M. (1996a). We may assume that there are many Arabic language programmes on the Web but please be aware that not all (material) Arabic language programmes are very useful. Therefore, we may recommend learning those programmes that have designed by the universities, by well organized, and by qualified persons; otherwise, we may waste our students' time as well as our precious time.

5. Discussion.

Language plays important roles in our daily live, for interaction with our neighbors and other countries all over the world. Language has a key role to play in conjunction with the unity of the nation and play its great role in terms of peace all over the world. The advantage of languages is tremendously important in coming future days as well as in the present time. Using communication technology (e-mail. chatting room, web sites, power point etc) will improve language learning and teaching

6. Suggestions.

Arabic language teachers should be well qualified to teach Arabic, enabling their students to communicate properly. Designing Arabic language programmes for specific purpose by curriculum designers, Arabic language teachers and instructional designers. Arabic language curriculum should meet students' needs and fulfill our objective. Designing Arabic language software and authoring program will help the learner. Besides that learners have to use word-processing and other computer features in their daily assignments. Establishing twinning programs between Arabic departments all over the world and Arab countries. Use the Internet in the interaction with Arab students as well as Arabic teacher and scholars. Establishing a group list for standard Arabic language. Last but not least, a simple Arabic language curriculum will help the learner.

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