

## Difficulties of learning Arabic for non-native speakers

Basma Ahmad Sedki Dajani <sup>a\*</sup>, Salwa Mubaideen <sup>b</sup>, Fatima Mohammad Amin Omari <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Jordan, Amman, 11183, Jordan

<sup>b</sup>University of Jordan, Amman, 11183, Jordan

<sup>c</sup>University of Jordan, Amman, 11183, Jordan

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### Abstract

The process of teaching Arabic for speakers of other languages can be effective through some overlapping factors; teachers' characteristics, learners' characteristics, program, programs' ability to meet the learners' needs and the audio visual aids. These factors should integrate and work harmoniously in order to give the desired results. This study aims to help teachers to improve the program, teaching skills and students' language acquisition. It is also useful in giving the teachers an understanding of the current overall situation of the program.

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### 1. Introduction

The process of teaching Arabic for speakers of other languages can be effective through these overlapping factors: the teachers' characteristics, learners' characteristics, the program, the programs' ability to meet the learners' needs, and the audio visual aids. These factors should integrate and work harmoniously in order to give the desired results.

Actually, there are some similarities, for example, between English and Arabic, since both use lingual forms, such as: nouns, verbs, sentences, etc. and they express similar functions, like: description, demand, analysis etc., and all other human languages are similar too. But they extremely varied in the phonemic, morphological, syntactical and semantic systems, which affect learning Arabic as a second language.

This study aims to help teachers to improve the program, their teaching skills, and the students' language acquisition. It is also useful in giving the teachers an understanding of the current overall "health" of the program.

### 2. The objectives of the study

1. To shed light on the program of teaching Arabic language for non-native speakers at the language center.
2. To identify the main dimensions of the effectiveness of learning Arabic language by non-native speakers.
3. To determine the factors that preclude effective learning of Arabic language skills.

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\* Basma Ahmad Sedki Dajani. Tel.: +0-962-79-5601-610  
E-mail address: [bdajani@hotmail.com](mailto:bdajani@hotmail.com)

To introduce convenient recommendations that may improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning Arabic language for non-native speakers.

### **2.1. The Effectiveness of teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages**

Teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages has become a wide field that attracts students from all over the world to learn Arabic.

The effectiveness of teaching Arabic for speakers of other languages is affected by many factors; some of these factors are related to teachers, learners, the Program, programs that meet the learners' needs and the language lab.

### **3. Teachers characteristics**

The effectiveness of teaching Arabic for speakers of other languages depends on a variety of characteristics in order to achieve the goals of teaching. So, we have to get rid of the idea that every speaker of a language is able to teach it, since to speak a language is totally different from teaching it, especially when students are speakers of other languages.

On the academic level, the teacher should fully comprehend certain aspects of the Arabic language such as: grammar, syntax and language structures and should have proper knowledge in literature in order to fulfill the student's needs and develop their language skills.

On the professional level, the teacher should be well-prepared and know how to communicate with his students, because his role is not limited to transfer the information only. However, the teacher should also be an organizer, a facilitator for the teaching process and a planner for various language activities. The teaching methods should be appropriate to different levels and the learners' capacity. The teacher should also use proper techniques and effective means to evaluate the learning operation.

Furthermore, although many educators possess the mandatory academic characteristics for a profession in teaching, many teachers are unable to communicate with their students in an effective and encouraging manner which requires focus on the development of personal characteristics such as; patience, flexibility, enthusiasm, honesty, confidence, and willingness. And they should know their students' psychology, their reasons for learning Arabic, their needs, tendencies, capacities, levels in Arabic, native language and the similarity between it and Arabic, etc... It also requires reinforcing and supporting the learner's ideas and encouraging them to use new words in order to memorize and understand it and to know how to use it correctly. These characteristics affect the language acquisition in a positive way, because language acquisition could not happen unless the student is relaxed and receptive. Bruner considers that the teacher is one of the most important elements in achieving the teaching goals.<sup>†</sup> Due to the importance of teachers, the researchers will offer recommendations dealing with the specific qualities that should be in the teacher who teaches Arabic for non-native speakers.

The results from the study that was conducted by Mahmoud Abdullah Saleh, has shown that teaching by any teacher requires the teacher to be characterized with personal attributes that are considered as an essential part of the teaching process, and these characteristics are represented in honesty, dedication, enthusiasm, the desire for learning, and smart and mature behavior combined with excellence in the academic and professional fields.<sup>‡</sup>

#### **3.1.1.1. Learners characteristics**

Learning Arabic language skills is affected by the students' diversity of backgrounds. In the light of learning these differences it is imperative to know the range of willingness of the learners to accept the educational experiences to know if there is harmonization between these features, materials, and the methods used in teaching.

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<sup>†</sup>Bruner, Jerome. *The Process of Education*, Harvard University Press, 1978. P89.

According to this harmonization the material and the teaching methods should be diversified to meet the different needs and levels through the use of audio-visual aids, not taken into consideration the teacher will not achieve the desired goals.

Past experience obtained by the students regarding the level of learning should be taken into consideration by the tutor. Gene attributes in his theory the cognitive development in the learners to the accumulated learning. According to Gene the learner's acceptance does not depend on the internal biological factors but on the obtained skills, which are necessary as a prerequisite to learn what is more complicated and difficult. Hence, past learning experiences form an important condition for learning. In some case the lack of past experiences could cause a case of frustration to the student and would generate a negative feeling towards the subject. Nevertheless, motivation would be recognized as an important tool to facilitate the learning process. Motivation is another important factor to success in learning a foreign language, it is human's internal incentive to learn, and there are several educational, individual and social factors that increase or limit motivation, such as intelligence, willingness, preservice, learning strategies and personal evaluation, but motivation basically depends on the purpose of learning a foreign language. Moreover, motivation of the student in this case refers to the tutor's ability, through the utilization of interaction methods, to attract the student's attention towards the taught subject until learning is achieved. Accordingly, the teachers' important task is identifying the student's needs and motives combined with the various conditions that surround and affect the student that either motivate or constrain him in the learning situation.

The teacher should attract the students' attention through the use of activities that are related to the subject of learning. On the other hand, if the student is not given the chance to express ideas and participate efficiently in the activities, the student will lose interest in the subject, which could lead to failure in the learning process. Moreover, working on the same type of routine activities by the teacher will frustrate the student which will result of not achieving the desired objectives of the learning process.

One of the most important tools used in motivation are incentives, the proper use of incentives positively modifies the students behavior, and helps in enhancing the pace of learning, which in turn indicates to the proper functioning of the student performance. This results in a positive and satisfying outcome that encourages the student to react to successfully tested methods. While negative reinforcement will not stimulate the student into a positive reaction towards the subject. Reinforcement is a form of feedback from the tutor; it revolves around the learner's behavior and the learner's response to the learning process of any subject.

Teachers of Arabic language should train their non-native Arabic speakers regularly into acquiring new language skills in an innovative way that the students wouldn't forget. Learning new skills in Arabic language does not guarantee the ability to use them in real life situations, the utilization of creative methods in teaching should be used by the teacher to direct the students into using these new skills in real life. For example, the teacher should abandon the traditional method of teaching and create real life situations which force the student into using the newly acquired skills.

Research proved that Europeans, for example, are seeking to learn Arabic with a high level of enthusiasm, but they give up when they realize that they are making every effort in learning a language that is not spoken in daily life at any Arabic country.

In some cases where appropriate the teacher might feel the need to divide the taught subject into a number of parts to facilitate the learning process, however the teacher should put emphasis on the relation between the parts and must take the time into directing the student towards building these parts together. Experts claim that for the student

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‡MahmmoudAbdallahSaleh. *MafhoumAlbramejAltadrebeyahLfa'aleyatAltadrees*, King Saud University Magazine (Ryad, Vol.2, 1990).

to understand the relationship between the different parts of the subject within a general framework helps in transmitting the impact of education effectively. The learner is the main element in teaching-learning process. The success of this operation depends on the learners.

In addition, there are some teachers who use an intermediate language while teaching Arabic for speakers of other languages. Scholars who allow using an intermediate language say that translation from the intermediate language to Arabic is more appropriate when teaching active vocabularies which people use mostly, but translation from Arabic to the intermediate language is more appropriate when teaching passive vocabularies. So they don't allow using an intermediate language all the time, but it depends on the situation.

Kartledge warned teachers of using an intermediate language, he said that "they are starting with the wrong end", because he thought that translation is the most difficult lingual exercise. (Boey, L.17)

On the other hand, Brooks summarizes what a learner of a second language should not do in three notes: (Brooks, N.18, P: 52)

1. Speak his mother language.
2. Study double-language lists of words, which contain a word and its translation.
3. Translate from the second language to his mother language.

If he doesn't follow these notes, he will lose his effort to learn the second language and his mother language will dominate.

#### **4. The program**

The program should help the learners of other languages by different means:

The program should provide the proper curriculum for teaching and should not focus on the book.

The program should help the learner to practice acquired Arabic skills by interacting with native speakers. The teacher can play this role by encouraging discussions and participation during tutorials. Also, it is necessary to teach students the colloquial language for some economic, social and cultural purposes.

The program should also focus on giving the students a chance to express their ideas freely. As the students' oral language grows stronger, this will reflect on the other skills already possessed.

Learning Arabic syntax by speakers of other languages is expected to be easier than learning it from Arabs who are affected by their dialects which are very different from standard Arabic. But foreign students complain of the long hours they spend in learning Arabic syntax, and they suffer from its rules, subdivisions and the difficulty in acquiring practical skills in using language correctly.

Some grammarians focus on syntax and morphology, they expanded on discussing different syntactic cases, verb inflections, gender, singulars and plurals, and comparatives, etc., but, unfortunately, they don't shed light on the meanings and functions of these various forms, since the meaning and the function of a word is the base of the whole lingual usage and can help the learner to make correct sentences and to express his ideas.

Another important point the program must have is to be flexible and take into account the individual differences by utilizing a variety of different materials that cater important individual needs that the students' have. The program must consider that all students have different goals for them to learn the language, which means that the teaching process should be varied, and the teacher should be innovative and inspire the students. The book that is used in this program should meet all the needs of the learners and should emphasize the basics of the Arabic language i.e. reading skills, writing skills and oral skills.

## 5. Program met by learners

The learners are considered an important part of the teaching process, and satisfying their learning needs is one of the bases of the program. The program has to be measured through important factors to understand if it meets the learners' expectations.

One of the important factors used to measure the program is the number of teaching hours, understanding first if the teaching hours are sufficient or not, and then monitoring the utilization of the teaching hours. It's not only important to have sufficient teaching hours, but it's equally as important to investigate if the teaching hours are efficiently distributed between the skills of the language.

Another factor should be considered as an important factor for the learners, and an important factor that should be studied in the program, is the difference between the Arabic language and the learners' native language. Some sounds used in the Arabic language might be difficult to learn for non-native speakers, and the duality in the Arabic language makes it difficult to learn since, there are a lot of differences between classical and colloquial.

### The lab

The most natural way to learn the language is to listen to it first and then to repeat what the learner have heard. Audio-visual aids are the next important step in teaching, especially in teaching languages to speakers of other languages. The teacher can use the lab for teaching various learning activities such as: core texts, related extended texts and grammar notes.

Research indicates that recorded lessons enable students to evaluate themselves and recognize their strengths and weaknesses in their reading and discussions. According to Simmons using audio-visual aids in teaching vocabulary leads to students' improvement in reading.<sup>§</sup> Mutawee confirms that using audio-visual aids helps the students reading, writing and expressions.<sup>\*\*</sup>

The lab can be a great help in teaching students if the nature of the material offered within the lab suits the students' linguistic and scientific capacities and if the exercises used in the teaching materials are clear and suitable.

### Test of hypothesis:

1. Teacher characteristics have an influence on increasing the capacity of non-native speakers in acquiring the Arabic language.
2. Learners' characteristics have an influence on increasing the capacity of non-native speakers in acquiring the Arabic language.
3. The program has an influence on increasing the capacity of non-native speakers in acquiring the Arabic language.
4. Meeting the needs of the learners by the program has an influence on increasing the capacity of non-native speakers in acquiring the Arabic language.
5. Using the language laboratory has an influence on increasing the capacity of the learners in acquiring the Arabic language from their point of view.

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<sup>§</sup> Simmons, J. L. "The Relationship between an Instruction Level in Spelling, and the Instructional Level in Spelling, and the Instructional Level in Reading among Elementary School Children," Dissertation abstract international, Vol.39. No.1.1978.P207. Ibrahim Mutawee et al. *AL-Wasael AL-Ta'imeyah*(Cairo: Maktabat Al-Nahdah AL-Masreyah, 1979) p.3.

It is clear from the results of the t-test for one sample that there are statistical significant differences at the level (0.05) between the means of the answers on the five factors and the Mean of the assumed scale (3). The means of the answers are higher than the mean of the assumed scale for the five factors. As a result the hypothesis of the study is accepted.

In addition, it is clear from the data table that the most effective factor in increasing the capacity of the foreign students in acquiring the Arabic language is using the language laboratory. The mean of the students' answers is 4.03 and standard deviation (0.73).

The following factor is the teacher characteristics by mean (4.01) and the standard deviation is (0.79).

The factor that has the least influence is "program met by learners" for which the mean of the answers is (3.35) and the standard deviation is (0.74).

### **The results of the study**

The researchers examined the factors that cause difficulty in acquiring Arabic language skills to the speakers of other languages. The study was also designed to measure the ability that foreign students have to learn the Arabic language and its skills. This study was conducted on the foreign students at the language center in the University of Jordan.

The results of the study that was applied to a sample of foreign students demonstrated that the students faced difficulties in learning Arabic language and acquiring its skills. The study revealed that these difficulties are related to the teachers' characteristics, learner's characteristics, the program, the program's capacity to meet the needs of the learners, and the use of the laboratory. Accordingly the researchers have stated the results of the study.

### **The teacher**

Almost all of the students indicated in the study that the teacher has a very important role in motivating students inside the classroom. However, it is not how intelligent and smart the teacher is. Nor does it matter how many research he wrote, but it is the preparation and the effectiveness of the teaching method and the teacher's ability to design activities that energize them, create excitement and enthusiasm that makes the teaching learning process easier and more enjoyable for both the students and teachers.

### **The Learners**

Many students think that the diversity of students' cultural and first language backgrounds does not negatively affect their learning. This indicates that students from different countries with different learning styles and expectations and the clash between these different expectations could negatively affect everyone in the group, even though most of the students were neutral.

The great majority of the students think that the learning experience relies primarily on the students' seriousness and their ability to adapt to the new learning environment.

Many students think that teaching Arabic should be done without intermediate language. However, this depends upon the level of teaching. Beginners need an intermediate language whereas intermediate and advanced students will benefit and learn better and faster without an intermediate language.

### **The program**

Most of the students agree that the program meets their needs but many students have remained neutral. The program focuses enough on the basic skills.

The effectiveness of the curriculum leaves students divided, where around 50% of the students think that the current curriculum is good and the other 50% think that it is inadequate.

Half of the students believe that the program takes into account students individual differences while the other half totally disagree.

The students do not believe that the current book used in the program meets their needs. They think that it is necessary to provide them with more resources and specialized books in teaching Arabic for non-native speakers and to focus on both the intermediate and advanced levels.

Some of the students complained about the textbook which they use because it gives them little support in learning the language and it does not support them during their interaction with native speakers.

### **Program met by learners**

The majority of the students indicated that the current number of teaching hours is enough for their learning. Almost half of the students think that the nature of the Arabic language makes it difficult to them to learn. Maybe this split between students depends on many factors, including: their levels, experience, frustration, duality of language (classical and colloquial) and modern standard Arabic.

Due to the duplication in language, the speakers of other languages find differences in the verbal, structural and the meanings of words in classical Arabic between what is taught inside the classroom and outside it. The ultimate result is a weak learning motivation.

The students mentioned several difficulties in the Arabic language that are because of the huge difference between Arabic and their mother language, and it's natural for the learners to face such difficulties.

Due to the difference between Arabic and the mother language, it is natural for the learner to face several difficulties. These difficulties are in the various levels of language:

On the Sound level: the difficulty is in pronouncing some letters such as: *صضطظعق* because many of world's languages do not have these phonemes in independent forms and symbols as in Arabic language, therefore almost of Arabic language learners who are speakers of other languages suffer from pronouncing these consonants.

On the morphological level: one of the problems that the learner may face is the difficulty in differentiating between the roots of the Arabic verbs and their sources. Another difficulty is the recognition of the sources of the verbs that consist of three letters because these are acoustic and they are easy to the Arab student who starts hearing them at a young age.

So, the learner suffers from the difficulty of looking for unfamiliar words in Arabic dictionaries, because it is necessary to know the root and the source of the word. Students of primary levels need to use dictionaries most.

On the grammatical level: among its difficulties is the topic of *Alidafah*, or distinguishing between the verbal and the nominal sentences, and distinguishing between the various prepositions, adverbs, the numbers and their rules.

In addition to that there are other difficulties such as: multiplicity of meanings in the Arabic language and the use of Arabic dictionaries that depend on the root, which has derivatives.

The students' various cultures: language is a significant instrument in the relations between the various civilizations, for language represents the culture. So the teacher must identify the Arabic culture to his students, because it is impossible to teach a language in a good way separated from the culture that created it, since language is an expression for civilization and a container of cultural heritage. Therefore, the teacher must have a deep understanding of the Arabic society and culture through direct communication if possible.

The Duplicity in Language: speakers of other languages find differences in the verbal, structural and the meanings of words in classical Arabic between what is taught inside the classroom and outside it. Teaching grammar always depends on the written language and ignores the daily-spoken language which makes grammar very far from the real usage and forces the learner to study abandoned old usages. In addition a real shortage of the program is that it completely ignores the daily-spoken language, as it is the language of communication and understanding among the members of the Arabic society. So the inevitable result is a weak learning motivation.

### **Lab**

The language lab was indicated as a positive language-learning tool for almost all students in the study, these results indicate:

- The lab is a necessary element in learning the Arabic language.
- The teachers utilize the resources of the lab effectively.
- The time that the students spend in the lab is sufficient to support the learning process.
- The diversity of the tools in the lab (audio-visual tools) helps the teaching process.
- The nature of teaching materials that are offered in the lab suits the students' linguistic and scientific capacities.
- The questions and exercises used as part from the teaching material are clear and suitable.

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