

Teaching Arabic for Islamic Purposes**ISNA Conference, Chicago****25-27 March 2005****By: Dr. Mamdouh N. Mohamed****Adjunct Professor, George Mason University****Abstract***** * ***

Languages invariably are learned/taught to be used primarily as means of communication. Notwithstanding, within the communication objective, languages are sometimes geared toward specific purposes or a particular field of knowledge, e.g., medicine, economics, media, religion, etc. Arabic is not an exception. Since the emergence of Islam Arabic has become its concomitant and message conveyer. Given the fact that the Holy Qura'n is written in Arabic, a minimum knowledge of that language has become a must for those who belief in Islam. Without this knowledge believers will not be able to perform their daily prayers and acts of worship. And since Islam is a universal religion that continues to attract non-Arabic speaking communities and individuals, the need for learning/teaching Arabic for religious purposes came into existence since the first decades of Islam.

Our Islamic schools and educational institutions stood for the challenge and tried to respond to the immense need of the non-native speakers Arabic for learning the language of their creed. As a quick fix, some have been using books and curricula designed for native speakers of Arabic. And Undoubtedly, teaching a language for its native audience differs from teaching it to non-native audience. And teaching a language for communication only is different from teaching it for specific purposes. Adopting such curricula and using its materials resulted in a lot of problems. The least, it confused teachers and students as well. Islamic educationalists have been working hard to professionally meet the need. They are following a systematic approach of stating clear and achievable goals, building suitable content, and applying new technology to present these learning experiences and evaluate them.

This paper/presentation suggests a model of designing instructional systems that responds to the need of non-Arabic speaking Islamic communities and provide the knowledge needed in both linguistic and cultural aspects.

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Teaching Arabic for Islamic Purposes

Introduction

It is almost impossible to find a group of people speaking one language on the same level of proficiency. There is always a wide range of differences amongst them. Some people are extremely eloquent whereas others might be mere illiterates. Between these two categories there is a large spectrum of many levels. Some people are good writers who can express themselves on paper much better than they do orally. Some are fluent speakers and can barely express themselves in writing. These examples are clearly manifested world wide regardless of language, race, and/or sex.

Surprisingly enough, average people can hardly understand the language used by doctors who share them the same language and culture. The same thing applies to other experts such as engineers, psychologists, lawyers, economists, pharmacists, etc. Eventually this specialized language is difficult for the average person. This simple fact can be understood in the light of there are various facets of any language. Beside the written form of the language, there is the spoken language, and terms for each field of knowledge.

Teaching languages for specific purposes

According to ACTFL¹, learning a foreign language requires between 1200 hours to 1800 hours. Apparently, these figures require a great effort and resources. Learning a language is not an easy task as it might look. Not every body is motivated enough, or can spare the time or the money for that goal. Consequently, the idea of learning a language for specific purpose sprang up. **Why should not the focus be only on specific areas in language learning?** The idea appealed to both teachers and learners. Enormous numbers of people began to adopt this idea.

This is how the concept of learning languages for specific purposes originated and developed. In fact, it helped to solve substantial problems. It helped students of medicine to narrow their scope of

¹ American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

learning the language to medical terms and idioms. Similarly, military personnel focused more on military terms and expressions. Learning languages for business purposes was also an area of interest for a huge number of people. Therefore, many specialized schools were established to teach languages for very specific purposes.

The Need for Teaching Arabic

Arabic is no exception. It is a language that is closely related to Islam. There is a huge market for it. Almost 1.3 billions are a potential audience who are interested in it for religious reasons. No Muslims can perform his daily prayers without having some knowledge in Arabic. It is the language of the Qur'an, the Holy Book for that huge audience. Obviously, there is a huge demand for that language.

This is the real motive for writing this article; to help Islamic schools enhance their Arabic curriculum by integrating Islamic subjects into it. The main concern for every Muslim can be addressed by directing their attention to this goal. Many schools and programs began to adopt this idea instead of the spoken language. Using the limited time assigned for learning Arabic now should be geared to learning Islamic Culture. One important factor that made this idea appealing to many schools is the sad fact that there are tens of Arabic dialects instead of one regional language that can be spoken and understood in all Arabic-speaking countries. So, why then should not the focus be on Arabic for Islamic purposes?

The Problem!

In private schools there is always a lot of pressure placed on the shoulder of teachers. In addition to the teaching load, they are asked to carry out other tasks such as curriculum development, section of books, and preparation of instructional media. Unlike public schools, which tremendously benefit from the huge resources of their counties and Department of Education. Private schools are independent. They do not get these benefits.

Islamic schools fall into this category of private schools. Therefore, there is a serious problem of selecting the instructional materials specifically in teaching Arabic as a foreign language. Most schools select instructional materials used in Arab countries, which are not designed for non-Arabic speaking students. Other schools try developing their own materials.

In addition to the selection of books, there are other problems as well. Students' parents come from different backgrounds. They have various expectations from learning Arabic. Some of them want their kids to learn so as to be able to read the Qur'an even if they do not understand it. Other parents come from Arab countries and want their kids to be able to speak Arabic. Ironically, the parents themselves do not communicate with their kids at home in Arabic.

Thus, one can see that the goals of teaching Arabic at Islamic schools are not specific. This causes a state of confusion. Neither the parents nor the parents are pleased with what is currently offered. Additionally, students themselves develop negative attitudes towards Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. Here comes the question: WHAT IS THE SOLUTION? In the coming few paragraphs I am going to propose a suggestion that might not be easy for school administrations to adopt.

Any school needs to formulate specific goal for teaching Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). I suggest that this goal should be to help students understand Islamic texts in general and the Qur'an in particular. In other words, the suggestion is teaching Arabic for Islamic purposes. This suggestion might be the answer for the majority of schools if not all of them.

In fact, there are many other issues that need to be fixed as well. Unfortunately, these issues do not fall within the scope of this paper. This paper focuses only on teaching Arabic for Islamic purposes.

How it works

In this approach, all unnecessary expressions, words, and idioms are replaced by words relevant to Islamic culture. Words such as refrigerator, mailman, and basketball can be replaced by words as messenger, paradise, and straight path.

Arabic names that are not mentioned in the Qur'an can be replaced by the most commonly names such as Muhammad, Adam, Ibrahim, and Musa. Similarly, the names of animals such as alligator, squirrel, and leopard can be replaced by other animals, which are mentioned in the Qur'an e.g. dog, elephant, and cow. This will strengthen the relationship between learners and Islam from the very beginning. However, these words should be presented within these guidelines:

- ❑ Words should be presented in contexts not in isolation.
- ❑ Words should be presented in meaningful contexts.
- ❑ Contexts should be at the cognitive level of students.
- ❑ New words should not exceed 1-2 words per line.
- ❑ Words should be reinforced in various contexts.
- ❑ Words should be learnt as a whole not as parts.

Similarly, words and expressions that are commonly used in Islamic cultures should be presented instead of words used in specific Arabic cultures. The beautiful names and Attributes of Allah should be presented as early and as gradually as possible. The easy names should come before the difficult ones.

Teaching Arabic for Islamic purposes is much more than just teaching a language. It comprises teaching various Islamic texts via Arabic. The goal here is that the language becomes a vehicle to help learners understand these subject matters (Islamic content-areas).

Teaching Reading via Made-up Islamic texts

Beginners can learn to read from the first day. They can learn even before learning the alphabet. The **holistic approach** can be used to enhance leaning at this level. In this approach, words and phrases can be taught before teaching isolated letters and sounds. Meaning should be provided by any means. Translation is not a taboo. Whenever needed, it should be wisely provided (without excessive use).

The following example shows that new vocabulary should be introduced gradually and intensively at the same time. In this way, it provides an ample room for these words to be adequately reinforced in the same text. New words are introduced wisely at the rate of 1-2 words per line. The use of colors is very effective in helping learners recognize new words. It also helps them associate the meaning with the written script very quickly. (See presentation #1).

اللَّهُ رَبِّي
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ مُحَمَّدٍ
 اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَرَبُّ مُحَمَّدٍ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَرَبُّ مُوسَى
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَرَبُّ مُوسَى وَرَبُّ عِيسَى
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ
 اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَرَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Although young kids (7-8 years) can read these texts, they are not designed for them. The cognitive level of students should be taken in consideration whenever a text is designed. Notice that learning vocabulary should be accumulative. New contexts should be based on previous learnt vocabulary. Another text that might go after the previous one:

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَغْرِبِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِينَ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَغْرِبِينَ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِينَ وَرَبُّ الْمَغْرِبِينَ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِينَ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ
 اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِبِ

For intermediate-low level and intermediate-mid level a higher language should be provided. After the teacher presents the new vocabulary, the reading passage can take that form:

خَلَقَ اللهُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فِي هَذَا الْكَوْنِ
 خَلَقَ السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَالْجِبَالَ وَالْأَنْهَارَ
 خَلَقَ الْجِبَالَ فِي الْأَرْضِ،
 وَخَلَقَ فِيهَا الْأَنْهَارَ وَالْبِحَارَ.
 جَعَلَ الْجِبَالَ عَالِيَةً وَالْأَنْهَارَ جَارِيَةً
 وَشَقَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ الْأَنْهَارَ الطَّوِيلَةَ،
 وَشَقَّ الْبِحَارَ الْوَاسِعَةَ،
 وَجَعَلَ مَاءَ الْبَحْرِ مِلْحًا وَمَاءَ النَّهْرِ عَذْبًا.
 سُبْحَانَهُ.

Teaching Reading Via Qur'an:

In the same way, Qur'an verses can perfectly fit as reading texts. Similar verses that address one theme should be selected to form a beautiful reading text. After introducing the new vocabulary, the following example can be introduced to intermediate-high level as well as for advanced-low level. The texts can be taken directly from the Qur'an and can be presented in a simple and gradual way:

وَ لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ ۖ
 لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ
 لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ
 وَ لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ
 وَ لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسَّوَسُ بِهِ نَفْسِهِ

◉ In the above-mentioned example, the reader can notice that these sentences (ayat) have the same theme. It is the creation of man. Most of the vocabulary is repeated. They represent the most authentic text. The introduction of new words is very gradually. The repetition of old words is beautifully reinforced.

Teaching Reading Via Hadith:

By the same token, other texts can be selected from any Islamic authentic texts. The richness of Hadith collections makes it easy for curriculum designers and teachers to make a good selection.

However, some criteria should be followed in selecting the Prophetic texts:

- They should be short; one line only.
- They should not have many difficult words.
- They should have the same theme.
- They should address the cognitive level of learners.

- 1 (مَنْ قَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ)
- 2 قَالَ مُحَمَّدٌ: (مَنْ قَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ)
- 3 قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (مَنْ قَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ)
- 4 قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (مَنْ قَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُخْلِصًا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ)
- 5 قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (مَنْ قَالَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَهُوَ لَا يَشْرِكُ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ)
- 6 قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (مَنْ مَاتَ مِنْ أُمَّتِي وَهُوَ لَا يَشْرِكُ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ)

Teaching Du'a:

Since du'a is a daily practiced by Muslims, teaching it as early as possible would be of vital importance. These segments can be taught to beginners. Whenever needed, English translation can be provided.

اللَّهُمَّ: عَافِنِي فِي بَدَنِي
اللَّهُمَّ: عَافِنِي فِي سَمْعِي
اللَّهُمَّ: عَافِنِي فِي بَصَرِي
لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ

* * * * *

اللهم ارزُقني نورًا
وَ مِنْ فَوْقِي نورًا
وَمِنْ تَحْتِي نورًا
وَ عَن يَمِينِي نورًا
وَ عَن شِمَالِي نورًا
اللَّهُمَّ: اجْعَلْ لِي نُورًا

One of the main concerns in this approach is selecting the materials that are suitable for students' cognitive abilities. Stories of the elephant, the ant, and the flame are very appealing to young kids. Stories of the messengers of Allah are

suitable for elementary levels. By using some picture, the story of the elephant can easily be understood by first graders or even by younger kids.

The daily supplications can also be part of Arabic curriculum. Easy and gradual texts can do the job. The use of non-verbal language can help students understand without translation.

Creative Exercises can do wonders

Exercises are probably more important than selected texts. Students learn from them more than they learn from the texts. Well-designed exercises are very useful in language learning. The main element in exercises is the comprehension factor. If exercises are based on comprehension, the results are more fruitful. There are mainly two types of exercises:

- 1- Exercises that are designed to test students' performance.
- 2- Exercises that help students acquire a skill or a rule.

In the first examples, students are supposed to select the right answer as in true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, and fill in the blank questions. There are also other forms. These are very helpful in the gradual acquisition of vocabulary and understanding given texts. (See presentation).

الحصان الفيل النملة الكتاب
رَمضان شعبان الجمعة شوال
اثان ثلاثة خمسة سبعة
نوح محمد عمر عيسى
الكتاب السرير الورقة القلم
العصر المغرب الجزائر العشاء
البقرة الخروف الجمل الكلب
يوم الدين يوم الفصل يوم الأحد يوم القيامة

Guided Questions:

In this exercise, students are provided with some guidance to help them answer the questions. Gradually, they get less directions and get more challenging questions.

.....	المغرب			آل عمران	البقرة
.....	أخي			أمي	أخي
.....	كبير			أسود	أبيض
.....	شعبان			الأحد	السبت
.....	طويل			بعيد	قريب
.....	6			4	2
.....	9			3
.....	بغداد			مصر
.....	الربيع			الصيف
.....	الإنسان			خالق

The second type is those exercises that aim at helping students learn from the given examples and follow the model. Then, gradually, students can observe the patterns and deduce helpful rules. (See presentation).

العصر	بَعْدَ الظهر
النهار	بعد الليل
.....	بعد الوضوء
.....	بعد شعبان
الحياة	قبل الموت
البعث	قبل الحساب
.....	قبل الصلاة
.....	قبل عيد الأضحى
.....	قبل قراءة القرآن
.....
.....