

Developing Speaking Skills in Arabic Learners: A Proposal for Integration of Product and Process Approaches

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Abstract

This work identifies the issues that concern Arabic language learning as a second language in Maldives educational institutions. It looks at ways of encouraging and motivating Arabic learners and explores issues relating to Arabic speaking skills, course design, and materials/task development, among others. The paper proposes an integrative approach to Arabic-speaking pedagogy. It provides a sample Arabic-speaking lesson that is designed to illustrate some of the main points discussed while the practical ways of using the principles in the designing of teaching materials for speaking are presented. A multiple-case study mixed-methods research design, a qualitative and quantitative research design, was used to achieve the research aim. Qualitative research was found suitable, as it allows for examination of opinions, beliefs, and emotions of people in a particular setting. Selected populations involve students, lecturers, tutors, and other stakeholders; data collection instruments were questionnaires, interviews, and procedures for analysis. The work concludes that product- and process-oriented approaches are complementary. Suggestions are provided for how teachers can assist Arabic learners in various educational institutions in the Maldives to develop their speaking skills by applying a functional-discourse-based approach, which integrates both product- and process-oriented methods.

Keywords: Arabic, Learning, Speaking, Integrative approach, Functional-discourse, Feedback.

1. Introduction

In recent years, several countries across the globe have been formulating educational policies to encourage the use of Arabic communication or applying to deliver educational tools helpful for assessment and collaborative-based performance learning (Zaki, 2012). Most of the discussion relating to language learners' proficiency-oriented instruction and testing focused on developing good Arabic speakers and maintaining the improvement of good communication and oral skills. Language learners have certain beliefs, opinions, perceptions, or emotions about people in particular settings and about the language being learned (Horwitz, 1987).

The emphasis on the importance of speaking proficiency can be attributed to a variety of factors. In order to overcome personal factors, people often use cognitive strategies to help better understand and remember specific items of the language, which are connected to the widespread popularity of audiolingual methods in the 1960s, and the movement for competence in communication situations that began in the 1970s. The interest in oral communicative competence and aiming the challenge at learning languages continues until today.

Similarly, Wenden (1987:103) found that views on language learning, strategies, attending patterns, and evaluation criteria were closely related to each other. Learners who stressed the importance of using the language to approach would often utilize communication strategies because as they interacted in various social settings, contemporary communicative language teaching approaches emphasized the importance of having the learners engage in "tasks" that encourage meaningful interaction.

In a study conducted in 1987 to identify the background factors that learners brought to the learning situation, learning, teaching, and communication strategies they consciously employ in language learning, and methods for developing communicative proficiency. Recent research in second language acquisition has

also considered oral interaction as important in shaping the learner's developing language ability. Studies have investigated the role of interaction in second language development, particularly in conversation between native and non-native speakers and among non-native speakers working in pairs or small groups (Gass, 1995, 1997; Smith, 1997).

Furthermore, it highlighted the role of output in learning, describing a variety of communication activities that can help learners develop accuracy as well as fluency through conscious reflection on their language production. The emphasis on oral proficiency does not mean that other skill areas ought to be neglected in language communication. However, as part of the goals of teaching Arabic in the Maldives institutions, both schools and universities ought to function adequately in Arabic for teachers to identify effective strategies for teaching this skill to attain the required levels of proficiency.

The paper describes and discusses involving strategies for teaching skill beginning with an exploration of the nature of speaking Arabic, Arabic speaker task difficulty, and Arabic course design issues. The work concludes on how the Arabic teacher can apply the task of helping the Arabic learners in the Maldives institutions to enhance pedagogical effectiveness and quality by developing speaking skills through the application of a functional discourse-based approach.

2. Methodology

This is mixed-methods research; a qualitative and quantitative research design was used to achieve the research aim. Qualitative research was found suitable, as it allows for examination of opinions and understanding of beliefs and emotions of people in a particular setting of phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). Selected populations involve students, lecturers, tutors, and other stakeholders; the data collection instruments used were questionnaires and interviews. The other elements that are taken into account are population, sample, instrument, procedure for collecting data, and procedure for analyzing data. The target population of this research comprised the students of particular institutions/schools in Male, Maldives, for the academic year 2017. A total of 117 respondents, 63 males and 54 females, responded to the questionnaire.

Data was collected from institution/school records and an interview with two students at the selected institution. Stakeholders that were selected for the research process were all volunteers who were willing to be part of the research process. These include teachers, students, and senior management members. Information from the stakeholders was collected according to their convenience and willingness to contribute to the research project. According to Marrja (2008), the criteria for a good sample are that it is selected from the entire population.

In the following table, the number of male and female respondents to the questionnaire is shown.

Table1.1

Male	Femal e	Tota l	Mal e	Femal e	Tota l	Mal e	Female	Total	Male	Femal e	Total	
G			G			G			G			Grand Total
18	17	35	22	13	35	14	15	29	9	9	18	117

2.1 Descriptive Statistics of Curriculum:

The descriptive statistics employed here targeted the degree of performance, frequency, percentage means, and deviations of the respondents. Each question of the questionnaire was given five options to respond to, which were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Undecided (UN), and the respondents' options ranged between these three options. Although five different options were guaranteed, the respondents' options ranged between three options (Agree, Disagree, and Undecided); it was decided to simplify the findings by the three options chosen. For the procedure for data analysis, the statistical package for social sciences SPSS version 22.0 was employed.

Table 1.2 shows the cumulative total percentage, means, and standard deviation of the responses to the items that measured the product of the curriculum of the institution/school. 82.9% of respondents disagreed that the product of the curriculum catered to the Maldivian culture, which reflects the high reliability and the need for reconsideration of the curriculum. At the level of the religious needs, 85.4% agreed that the

curriculum product enriched their religious needs, in comparison to 2% of respondents who disagreed. In terms of modifying the current Arabic speaking skills from the curriculum product, 91.4% agreed that the Arabic speaking skills enhancement work activities are in need of modification or reform. In reference to the fourth item, it reflects the need for the curriculum to be modified as a whole, while a total of 79.4% agreed that lack of facilities hinders their development of speaking Arabic as a second language.

Table 1.2: Description of Arabic Curriculum of Institution/School

Item	A	D	UN	Mean	SD
1. The Arabic curricula in the institution cater the Maldivian culture.	13 11.1%	97 82.9%	7 5.9%	39	0.91
2. The Curriculum enriched the students' religious needs.	100 85.4%	2 1.8%	15 12.8%	39	0.62
3. The curriculum of institution is in need for modification.	107 91.4%	5 4.3%	5 4.3%	39	0.71
4. Lacks of facilities in the institution hinder the students' development in speaking Arabic language.	93 79.4%	10 8.5%	14 11.9%	39	0.50
Average	0.69				

2.2 Descriptive Statistics on the impact of Arabic curriculum on students:

In regard to the set of items measured the impact of the Arabic language learning in the Maldivian students' four linguistic skills shows in the table 1.3, about 69% of respondents were undecided whether the Arabic curriculum improved their listening skills. This percentage was an obstacle to measure the reliability of the study at this point because listening skills are considered as source of acquiring the language. On the other hand, 40% respondents agreed that their listening skills has been improved in regard of the second issue which has been targeted by the questionnaire, 70% of respondents agreed that their reading skills have been positively affected and improved where 43% were unable to decide whether their reading skill has been developed or not. At the level of speaking skill, a majority of 94.01% disagreed that their speaking skill has been developed which indicate to a critical default in the curriculum and reliability of the statistics in measuring the learners' attitudes or perceptions towards the course design, materials, and task development. Finally, 79.4% of respondents agreed that their writing skills have been positively affected by learning Arabic language in the institution(s).

Table 1.3: Description of impact on four skills in Arabic language

Item	A	D	UN	Mean	SD
1. The Arabic curricula in the institution improves my listening skills	40 34.1%	8 6.8%	69 58.9%	39	0.37
2. My reading skills improved through the Arabic curriculum in the institution.	70 59.8%	4 3.4%	43 36.7%	39	0.40
3. The curriculum has improved my speaking ability.	7 5.98%	110 94.01%	0 4.3%	39	0.74
4. The curriculum has greatly impact my writing skills.	93 79.4%	10 8.5%	14 11.9%	39	0.60

Average	0.52
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2.3 Interviews

The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner; the findings revealed that speaking the Arabic language is not too difficult if they have a lot of vocabulary and practice it continuously. They believe that group work activities, performance tasks, and effective feedback give opportunities to the learners to develop speaking Arabic freely with their peers and build high self-confidence among themselves. They also prefer the teachers to be more creative in teaching speaking to encourage the students to learn Arabic as well as to create a supportive environment regarding Maldivian culture. However, one of them faced difficulties in speaking the Arabic language. He was unable to express his ideas clearly and made many mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, morphology, and vocabulary. The reason was lack of confidence and fear to speak. However, this kind of problem can be solved if the students themselves realize the importance of the Arabic language as well as master the four language skills components, which are known as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Gamal Abdul (2003), as cited in Sueraya (2012 & 2013), Ibn Khaldun stresses that language learning will become a reality through practice and the ability to use it. So as a student, he must always initiate speaking practice to be familiar with the language because practice makes perfect. From developing and enhancing the students' ability through the current product and process, and on the other hand, to shed light on the point of view towards the need to modify the current phenomena. They also argued that the curriculum itself played a role in the inefficiency of students in speaking or understanding the Arabic language. They added that teachers themselves, especially those who come from Arab countries, played a critical role because the majority of them are experienced in the content of the curriculum (not the product) but lack teaching methodologies. Also indicated that the teachers take a long time to get involved in the local culture and become familiar with the Maldivian environment. Moreover, they argued that teachers need continuous training. In order to the current curriculum is urgently in need for modifying to students centered.

2.4 Data Analysis

The current study employs qualitative and quantitative research methods. 117 respondents and 2 interviewees were conducted for data collection. The participants were first, second, third, and final year students who are studying Arabic language in various institutions, as shown in table 1.1. All of them were Maldivians. These students have to take courses known as advanced certificate level, foundation level, and degree. The lessons were carried out twice or thrice (or five days) a week for a number of period hours each session length is for 14-18 weeks and above as proposed by Dornyei (2007). This study involves a small number of respondents. Furthermore, using a small sample size may not help researchers to be more focused, which enables them to gain a better understanding of the issue learned. At the same time, the results will be more accurate compared to the big sample size, which may give relevant information.

3. Results

Research findings show that two linguistic skills out of four were negatively affected because the curriculum was ineffective at developing learners' speaking skills, while the writing skills were developed. Further, the research findings suggest a strong need for modifying the context and using different teaching pedagogical practices fully equipped with all skills. The finding of the research could help in advancing educational practices at a broad national level. Therefore, a language learner should be able to master all four (4) components in order to accomplish the language learning objectives. However, among all skills, speaking is commonly used to judge a language learner's competence.

In this respect, the present finding agrees with Lazim (2000), who found that about 80% of schools involved in his study, especially the educated groups working at government agencies along with MOE (Ministry of Education) like NIE (National Institute of Education), Tourism Management Board, and the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Trade Fairs, and Tourism in the Maldives, emphasize communication as their part of their lives and the main objective of learning the Arabic language. Obviously, these agencies require them to be able to communicate well with Arab clients and tourists frequently.

Furthermore, learning would be more effective and meaningful if learners were able to speak well. This is all the more obvious since Arabic is the main medium of communication, especially during group discussion, class presentation, and participation. Its significance was further highlighted by Khalid (2010), who stated that understanding Islam is possible through reading and learning; to reach a higher level of understanding requires good conversational and rhetorical skills in Arabic to criticize, debate, and discuss critically with the experts.

Respectively, they commented that Maldivian learners should be able to achieve advanced Arabic speaking skills at the end of their study, especially for those specializing in Arabic language. This perception assumes that the Maldivian learners have spent long years learning and being exposed to the Arabic language, and therefore they should have acquired good Arabic speaking skills. The findings showed that the participants possessed quite a realistic perception of the significance of Arabic speaking skill. They realized that speaking skill is critical for functioning fully in a language context, both inside and outside the classroom. They are aware of the importance of good Arabic speaking skills for the said purposes. (Macaro, 2001)

Moreover, self-confidence is important to become good Arabic speakers. Learners often need to be able to speak Arabic with confidence to carry out many of their most basic transactions in the classroom as well as outside the classroom with native speakers, in co-curricular activities, and so on. Therefore, they need to overcome or at least reduce the shyness or fear of speaking Arabic; otherwise, they cannot perform these interpersonal and social relationships successfully.

Another aspect of speaking that is particularly relevant for second language speakers concerns whether or not the speaking is planned or spontaneous. In the case of Arabic language learners as a second language, the provision of planning time can significantly increase levels of both fluency and accuracy in Arabic speaking. If the Arabic instructors are teaching the students who must make oral presentations in Arabic, it is important to provide opportunities for them to give prepared presentations in the class. The other factors that inhibit the use of the Arabic language in the Maldivian institutions include difficulties in transforming. Therefore, motivation is a main key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Motivation refers to the combination of efforts plus the desire to achieve the goals of learning the Arabic language plus favorable attitudes towards learning language.

There are identified demotivation factors of Arabic students in the Maldives learning institutions. These include lack of success over time or lack of perception about projects, uninspired teaching, boredom, lack of perceived relevance of Arabic instructional materials, lack of proper knowledge about the Arabic program, and finally, lack of appropriate feedback.

Therefore, the research findings suggest some of the motivation factors are: ensure to make Arabic instructional goals to be explicit to learners, break learning down into sequence of achievable steps, link or align Arabic learning to the needs and interest of the learners, allow Arabic learners to bring their own ideas, knowledge's and perspectives into the learning process, encourage creative Arabic language use and prepare for real life, improve the questioning techniques, lengthening the amount of time between asking a question and nomination someone to respond with limits of wait time, focus on content rather than form, establish good relationship and help Arabic learners identify the strategies underlying the learning tasks, they are engaged in.

The research findings also show that the Arabic language learning in the institutions of Maldives has negatively affected two linguistic skills out of four, that 94.4% of students consider the curriculum ineffective to develop their speaking skills, and that 58.9% are undecided whether they have been positively affected or not. At the level of writing skill, 79.4% of students agreed that their skill has developed, but the researcher deems that there is a misunderstanding on the part of respondents regarding what was intended by writing skills, i.e., the ability to write freely and have the potential to properly compose an article or short story.

Furthermore, the research findings suggest that the Arabic curriculum is in strong need of modification after more than three decades of implementing the same curriculum. However, since the majority of students are Maldivian, the curriculum should be tuned to their cultural, linguistic, religious, and behavioral aspects. Moreover, the researcher claims the teachers would benefit by this research, as this research would enable them to understand their strengths and weaknesses in this area. Besides, it would enable them to understand and use different teaching pedagogical practices that could be used in taking lessons using appropriate resources in a much more effective way and thereby improve students' understanding of the subject being taught. Moreover, the findings of this research will not only benefit the school in which the research is

carried out, but on the other hand, it will benefit all the schools in the country that are providing education and whoever is in need of any assistance in the area.

The impact the study could have on improving learning and speaking experiences for the students could be considerably high. Once fully equipped with all skills, teachers could transform classrooms into dynamic places where knowledge is constructed and disseminated in an unprecedented fashion. With not many studies being carried out in the field, the findings of the research could help in advancing educational practices at a broad national level.

4. Discussion

This study reveals that different activities are highly recommended to develop learning speaking Arabic skills by integrating product and process among the Maldivian learners. It helps students to use different types of activities and performance to enhance the need for Arabic-speaking skills. When the activities are done, then the students become more confident and comfortable in delivering thoughts because they have been given wider opportunities to practice using the language more frequently. This makes it valuable to the variety of works that encourage and support second language development (Lightbown, 2003).

This study also discusses how strategies for teaching the speaking skill begin with an exploration of the nature of speaking Arabic, Arabic speakers, task difficulty, and Arabic course design issues. The work emphasizes how the Arabic teacher can go about the task of supporting the Arabic learners in the Maldives in various institutions to develop the speaking skill through the application of a functional discourse-based approach.

As noted by Faqee (2015), the most basic problem in foreign language teaching is preparing learners to be able to use the language. In order to be successful in teaching and learning the target language, both teachers and learners have to put in their efforts. However, the students have to give more effort compared to the teachers. As mentioned by Abu Amsha (2018), self-esteem or self-direction is very important for language learners, because they will not always have teachers around them to guide them, especially when they use the language outside of the classroom. Besides, the teachers must also vary their teaching methods and approaches in order to achieve the goals in learning Arabic as a foreign language. He also mentioned since communication is a process, it is insufficient for learners to simply have knowledge of target language forms, meanings, and functions. Therefore, learners must be able to apply this knowledge practically, as stated in the goal of the speaking course; students should be able to communicate in the Arabic language fluently and confidently using the correct components of skills.

This research would enable the school management to find out the teacher's level of knowledge on Arabic resources and set up appropriate ways for non-Arabic speakers; this is noted by Shalabi (1980). It would also help them determine the effective ways of making teachers use the available resources in the teaching-learning process and the type of training the teachers require in order to enhance their skills in the learning and teaching area. Thus, teachers must create activities that will help learners to master the Arabic language skills. Many tasks can be carried out in speaking activities such as watching Arabic movies, listening to Arabic songs, playing Arabic games, role-playing, discussion, and presentations. The teachers can guide the learners in the performance of activities for the first time. Then he or she can ask the peers to attempt the tasks based on what they have learned. When they are familiar with the tasks, they will be able to explore new knowledge or find out about the materials related to the course for learning Arabic speaking skills via online movies, cartoons, songs, forums, or magazines. These materials, however, need to be used by learners. This makes language learning and speaking more meaningful and beneficial in preparing good citizens for real-life situations.

Due to these factors, the learners usually become motivated, especially in producing a successful outcome at the time of speaking the Arabic language. As proposed by Madkour (2015), the more one succeeds, the greater one's motivation, and the greater one's motivation, the more one succeeds. Furthermore, soft and interesting skills can be instilled among learners. As an example, they will be able to learn and communicate how to be fluent in speaking Arabic to manage and solve problems in daily life.

Good speaking skills do not only mean speaking fluently but also speaking correctly and achieving the required knowledge about the language. The researcher believes that missing one important element to becoming a good Arabic speaker is knowledge about the language. Especially having a good command of the Arabic language, for example, a sufficient collection of Arabic vocabulary and a good command of Arabic grammar, such as Arabic syntax and Arabic morphology, will surely beautify their language, thus enabling them to gain courage and confidence to speak.

The above findings correspond to the study of Abraham & Vann (1987), who reported that successful and less successful learners differ in their efforts to achieve grammatical correctness and flexibility in using strategies. The broader view believes language learning requires attention to both function and form, including vocabulary, morphology, and grammar; knowing how to begin and end Arabic conversation; knowing what topic can be talked about in different ways of speech arts; and knowing which address should be used with different persons one speaks to and in different situations. A person with Arabic communicative competence must also know how to use and respond to different types of speech, such as requests, apologies, thanks, and invitations. This indicates that he/she must know how to use language appropriately. Based on the interviews conducted with students, they now realize that the Arabic language is not as difficult as other people assumed. They have to put in their efforts in order to be a good speaker in the Arabic language, not only for the purpose of passing the examination but also for applying it in the real world, especially with Muslim nations and communities.

The researcher would like to suggest that grammar should be included in the designed course because language is closely related to grammar. (Abdelcader, 1993) Grammar is very crucial in learning any language. Thus, the goal, objective, and target of the course cannot be achieved in most situations if the teaching of grammar is not implemented to develop the speaking Arabic language skill through the application of a functional-discourse-based approach, which is an integration of two (product and process) approaches.

5. Conclusion

The work concludes that product- and process-oriented approaches are complementary. Suggestions are made on ways in which the teachers can go about the task of helping and supporting the Arabic learners in various educational institutions in the Maldives to develop the proficiency of speaking skill through the application of a functional-discourse-based approach, which is an integration of the two approaches. This could be carried out with a variety of instructional techniques and activity formats, but also a balanced approach to feedback and correction strategies. Besides that, the research findings suggest the Arabic curriculum is also in strong need of reforming and modifying, because in that sense 94.4% of students consider the curriculum ineffective for developing their speaking skills, and 58.9% are undecided whether they have been positively affected or not. Moreover, the study indicates the activities chosen for practice of Arabic speaking should be carefully planned within the range of learners' interest and competence, where it will be useful to help avoid the gap between active students and passive students in terms of motivation and helpful to build self-esteem and confidence among learners. The ongoing debate over the product- and process-oriented approach is also examined to become more student-centered rather than teacher-centered. Therefore, it is important to create an environment that will support the students' learning process and give ample opportunities to use creativity for acquiring Arabic speaking skills as well as other skills in the Arabic language through the application of a functional-discourse-based approach.

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