

THE ARABIC LANGUAGE TEACHER AND THE NEW ADVOCATED TEACHING METHODS: PERSPECTIVES FOR INNOVATION.

Abstract

In the new millennium, there is a persistent call for innovation and change, and there is “...a confident belief that progress in learning inside and outside the school is the key to the future” (Sultana, 2001:04). Today, the global scientific, technological and political changes of the 21st century contribute in the emergence of intercultural contact at local and international levels. In addition, nowadays, the information age has replaced the industrial age, giving way to the supremacy of processed information through computers, and mainly through the internet. Therefore, the expansion and progress in the world of technology led to the need for the re-consideration of the status the Arabic language being the language of education has in the Algerian national syllabus. Thus, Arabic has become a *sine qua non* condition for success at all levels and an effective element in the National Educational System. Algeria, like the rest of the world, is well aware of the importance of Arabic-dominated communication and learning in the country and elsewhere. It strives to cope with the new world requirement not only by keeping abreast all development forms, but also by setting about whole programmes for evolution and improvement.

As is patently obvious, the task or act, we may say, of “teaching” encapsulates a lot more than merely providing instruction and guidelines for learners. It presupposes a psychological and philosophical knowledge on the teacher’s part, so as to combine techniques in the class, as well as sufficient command of the basic structure of human existence, with a view to assess any situation accurately and appropriately. Furthermore, the teacher, when being provided with all the necessary ingredients to perform his mission in the classroom, can work more successfully. The present paper gives a bird’s eye view of the new status the Arabic language has in the curriculum with reference to the existing approaches and methods. In so doing, we will try to answer the following questions: **What roles specifications are teachers expected to perform within the new implemented approaches? How will they be able to cope with such modernized changes? To what extent will they be cooperative with the learners when supervising their competencies? How can the educational supervisor facilitates the Arabic teacher's tasks?**

Key Words:

The National Educational System- The teacher- Teaching approaches and methods- Language programmes.

Arabic in the Modern World

We should not underestimate the significance of Arabic language. There are indeed a number of reasons to learn this language :

1. Arabic is an official language in more than 20 countries and one of the official languages of the United Nations. It is the fifth most commonly spoken language in the world with more than 300 million native speakers.

According to **Weber's** article "The World's 10 Most Influential Languages" in *Language Today* (Vol. 2, Dec 1997): (number of native speakers in parentheses)

1. **Mandarin Chinese** (1.2 billion)
2. **English** (330 million)
3. **Spanish** (300 million)
4. **Hindi/Urdu** (250 million)
5. **Arabic** (200 million)
6. **Bengali** (185 million)
7. **Portuguese** (160 million)
8. **Russian** (160 million)
9. **Japanese** (125 million)
10. **German** (100 million)
11. **Punjabi** (90 million)
12. **Japanese** (80 million)
13. **French** (75 million)

The following is a list of these languages in terms of the number of countries where each is spoken. The number that follows is the total number of countries that use that language (from Weber, 1997):

1. **English** (115)
2. **French** (35)
3. **Arabic** (24)
4. **Spanish** (20)
5. **Russian** (16)
6. **German** (9)
7. **Mandarin** (5)
8. **Portuguese** (5)
9. **Hindi/Urdu** (2)

10. Bengali (1)/ Japanese (1)

2. People who also speak Arabic can have a competitive edge in law, medicine, journalism, education, finance, translation and interpretation and, foreign services.
3. History has shown that Arabs contributed to the advancement of science, medicine, and philosophy. Much learning from the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures was preserved for the world through the Arab libraries. Arabs have also made significant contributions in such areas as literature, mathematics, navigation, astrology, and architecture. Knowledge of Arabic enables the exploration of this vast body of knowledge in their original form.

Arabic in the Educational System

The Arabic language is the most potent symbol of Arab-Islamic culture and its transmission, and as such has always been considered the necessary medium of instruction. Nearly all Arabs accept the importance of primary and secondary instruction's being conducted in Arabic; and, in fact, Arabic does dominate the curriculum through all schools. Algeria, which long had a French educational system, completed its transition to Arabic in 1989, when the first class of twelfth-graders graduated from a completely Arabic education.

However, a good part of university instruction in Algeria and the Arab world remains yet in English and French, prompting a major debate. On the one hand, a great majority of Arabs, regardless of their own linguistic skills, in principle favour the Arabization of higher education.

Also, attempts to Arabize instruction have run into the hard barrier of practicality: resources to make a complete switch simply are not there. The result is a splitting of institutions into Arabic- and European-language sections. Islamic studies and Arabic literature are the only completely Arabized disciplines. Scientific and technical instruction takes place in English even at Cairo's venerable Arab-Islamic institution, Al-Azhar, and at the universities of Medina and Mecca. In the entire Arab world, only Syria appears to have managed completely to Arabize its university. The other countries have all partially Arabized, with the humanities and social-science disciplines largely or completely in Arabic, and the scientific and technical fields largely or completely in English or French.

Pedagogical Implications

Teaching and learning have long been considered separately. On one part, learners are considered as being uniform in cognitive abilities, learning strategies and potential needs. They are to take the knowledge poured on them by the teacher, memorize it and reproduce it faithfully during exams. Teachers on their parts are to teach a given syllabus, coping with mixed ability classes and following a

given approach to students. These teachers may participate in the decisions about content choice, methodology or evaluation practices but this is rarely done. In addition to other problems such as: the unsuitable evaluation, the overloaded programme and the insufficient time load. Thus, teachers should devise content, a teaching methodology, and foresee outputs that are appropriate to the Arabic language status in Algeria and to learners' abilities. In the following work, three of the main teaching/learning variables will be considered: the teaching methodology, the teacher and the educational supervisor.

Teaching Methodology

Language teaching is very often discussed in terms of three related aspects “approach”, “method” and “technique”. Different approaches to language determine different methods of teaching; and different methods make use of different classroom activities.

In fact, the Arabic language teaching methodology in Algeria has witnessed various changes in the application of the teaching approaches, since independence (in 1962). These Methods were criticized worldwide, and reactions to their limitations were accompanied with socio-political changes, the fact that urged the introduction of new approaches and methods. Therefore, the emergence of the newly advocated “Competency-Based Approach”, (henceforth CBA) “المقاربة بالكفاءات” has come to provide the necessary conditions for language learning, and guide learners to shift from knowledge acquisition to knowledge use and thus achieve the required level of proficiency. Nevertheless, the communicative approach still dominates in Algeria, but, with different applications.

Competency Based Approach: Aims and Procedures

The competency-based approach or the approach by competencies does not represent a complete change from the communicative approach. It consists in re-injecting knowledge acquired at school in different and significant contexts of use that will make it viable and durable. Indeed, by helping the learner to give direction to his learning, the approach makes him acquire intellectual competencies and develop various processes that are necessary to the assimilation and the use of his knowledge. It is an approach that implies, among other things, a process of apprenticeship involving a transfer of skills from a coach/teacher to trainee/learner. It advocates the shift from memory based to problem solving learning, taking into consideration learner's communicative needs and learning strategies.

As a matter of fact, the competency-based approach means “learner-centered learning” and “assessment of learner learning outcomes”. Eventually, the learners will be capable of assessing their learning progress. In case they notice weaknesses, they can overcome them and avoid them later on in their learning process. This is important, as it shows that the learners are made responsible for their learning. Thus, the crucial point about the competency-based approach is that it encourages the learner to use, develop and demonstrate the competencies required in the performance of his learning.

Consequently, he will find himself involved in a process of “learning how to learn”, i.e. the learner will be provided with opportunities to rely on himself rather than on his teacher.

The methodology adopted in the competency-based approach is task based. The skills appear in the syllabus in the form of meaningful tasks, engaging the learner in authentic language use, and resulting in a shift from acquiring to using knowledge. The teacher plays the role of monitor and organizer of the classroom, taking decisions and providing guidance when necessary.

Furthermore, the experiment of the communicative approach during the last decades has shown that even if the learner has reached a certain mastery of the language, the fact is that in practice, his performance remains at a very low level. That is why the new advocated approach by competencies has become a priority.

From the situation of knowledge-holder, the teacher becomes a mediator between the learner and knowledge. His task is to guide, help, stimulate, encourage and support the training and development of learners. In addition to this, the Arabic teacher has a lot to do in the classroom.

Teaching Arabic language through the CBA

Teaching the Arabic language through the competency-based approach is no more monopolized by the teacher. Therefore, learners are made aware of their active participation in the creation of outcome from the received intake. In addition, learners are involved in “how and what to do” to bring solutions to problems, and they “learn how to learn” by using appropriate learning strategies. In this way, learners are taught how to be flexible learners and use different sub-skills and strategies according to different purposes in learning.

Moreover, the way the Arabic language course is taught through the competency based approach, is “learner centered” rather than “teacher centered”. More specifically, it is a well established fact that a teaching that does not give opportunity for the learner to develop learning styles and strategies is useless teaching. In this respect, Widdowson claims that “*a pedagogy that does not involve learner participation is not likely to be as effective as one that does*” (Widdowson, 1983:76).

Thus, the teacher’s role necessarily changes. He has no longer the role of absolute holder of knowledge but has to be a guide, a coordinator, an observer and an assessor. He has, mainly, to be an instrument rather than an authority. Consequently, learners are no longer dependent on their teacher. Rather, they should be more responsible for their learning and more aware of their needs and difficulties. Therefore, each learner will evaluate himself, and tries to progress gradually. It is worth noting that, this is not limited by a certain period of time, but rather by the mastery of some competencies so that learners become autonomous, i.e. they conduct their learning by themselves without full reliance on the teacher.

And indeed, “*these changes strengthen teachers’ roles making them more varied and more creative. Their status is no longer based on hierarchical authority, but on the quality and importance of their relationship with learners*” (Oxford, 1990:11).

Furthermore, the competency-based approach seeks to teach learners how to re-use the learned strategies to solve problems they encountered in their life. So that their learning become no longer passive but rather active since they will be better prepared to make conscious decisions about what they can do to improve their learning and what they can do when they do not know what to do.

The principle core of learner-centered approach is that learners use whatever language at their disposal to solve interrelated learning problems, and so become more likely to retain what they have learnt. This requires “teachers in action” and involves a constant learners needs’ analysis since it is believed that “*the successful implementation of a language programme may depend on how well it matches the expectations, learning styles, and values of the learners*” (Richards, 1985:14). What is more, the teacher may also need a source of guidance when necessary. This can only be provided by the educational supervisor.

The Concept of the Educational Supervision (Inspection)

Researches explained educational supervision as an essential task aims to improve the learning condition for the learners. It is a service that helps the teacher to develop all his/her capabilities and perform well. The Guidebook of general administration for educational supervision in the Ministry of Education has explained the meaning of educational supervision as a systematic and well-planned action aims to reinforce the educational learning accomplishment from all its aspects.

Most concepts of educational supervision are based on the improvement and evaluation of the teaching process to achieve a continuous growth of the teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, supervision is considered to be an effective tool in the teaching process. It is largely argued that supervision is a process of readjustment and assistance from one level to another in an academic system. The principles for the modern supervision are summarized as follows:

- *Good supervision*, which is based on theoretical and practical foundations, has a role in connecting science with real experience.
- *Modern supervision* depends upon democracy in guidance and counseling.
- *Modern educational supervision* calls for good and organized cooperative activities in planning and implementation.
- *Educational supervision* is the first and direct activity that investigates the circumstances surrounding the teachers and students’ learning in a school climate. This activity is directed to

serve the teachers through assisting them to perform their duties and improving their teaching services.

In the last few years many studies and researches called for changing the term inspection into the term educational supervision. The latter term denotes the insightful investigation to find out the relationship between the behaviours of teachers and students inside and outside the classroom. It also means awareness of the obstacles that handicap the teaching process and providing all the necessities to improve the process of teaching and learning.

The modern concept of educational supervision is that it is a cooperative technical service that aims basically at studying the conditions that affect the educational process, choosing the most suitable ones or modifying and implementing them. Being aware of educational process, the supervisor should have the skills of human relations and dealing with teachers and students. Explaining the position of educational supervision within the general educational system, it is widely argued that educational supervision is a subsystem within the whole system of the educational administration.

The Role of the Educational Supervisor in Guiding Teachers

The interaction between the educational supervision system and the school administration leads to improve and evaluate the teaching and learning process. It also helps to improve the curriculum planning, the curriculum, the administration, the textbook, the methods of teaching, the teaching aids, and to provide materials and human resources to achieve the aims of teaching and learning.

Moreover, the interaction between the supervisory system and in-service training system is also important in developing teachers' skills. In-service training is considered as a supervisory style used by supervisors in order to improve the teaching competencies during service. These competencies are divided into two main parts, theoretical and practical parts. The following Diagram explains this concept.

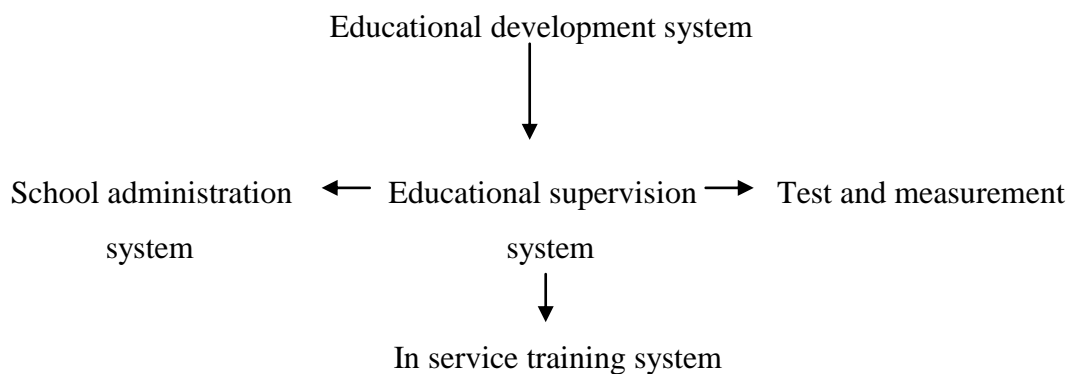


Diagram 1: Educational Administration System

The theoretical part of the teaching competencies could be summarized as follows:

1. Understanding the subject matter that he/she teaches.
2. Knowledge of the mental, emotional and physical characteristics of his/her students.
3. Capability in modern teaching methods particularly of the subjects he/she is teaching.
4. Knowledge of the general educational objectives and particular objectives of the course he/she teaches.
5. Knowledge of and the particular method he/she applies as well as its social and psychological foundations.
6. Full awareness of the available material resources and the way of utilizing them in teaching and learning.
7. Knowledge about the effect of the new findings in the field of education and psychology with regard to learning and teaching.

The practical part of the teaching competencies could be briefly described as follows:

1. Teacher's ability to plan for his/her lesson.
2. Teacher's ability to manage the classroom.
3. Teacher's ability to use teaching aids.
4. Teacher's ability to use teaching and mass communication tools.
5. Teacher's ability to utilize the textbook.
6. Teacher's ability to ask provocative questions.

As far as the interaction between the supervisory system and the testing and the measurement system is concerned, the supervisor conducts, develops and implements general tests to be used in evaluation process. The interaction between the supervisory system and the educational and curriculum development system could be perceived in the fact that the supervisor should be well-versed in the school curriculum and fully aware of its shortcomings and the ways to amend or correct them.

Arabic Language Teacher s' Roles

The role of the Arabic language teacher is hard to assume because of administrative constraints the teacher has to deal with learners of mixed abilities, of different learning strategies and of low motivational drives. These learners have rather low proficiency level in Arabic. Therefore, he has to manage teaching his subject matter defying the different constraints, namely the crowded classes, the amount and scheduling of the time allotted to teaching some subjects, and the lack of appropriate materials. He must set both short and long-term objectives for their learning. These objectives should be constantly relevant, because *“with the passing of time, new situations arise, for a nation and its people, or for a district and*

its schools, and these establish priorities of objectives of the teachers of other languages, who must be constantly aware of such changes if their teaching is to be appropriate to the generation of students before them". (Rivers, 1981:7-8). Besides, the teacher has to help learners reach a certain level of performance when using the language and is supposed to reach the set objectives prescribed by the syllabus .

The primary concern of the teachers is to modify their teaching methodology into an eclectic and flexible practice that is based on a constant analysis of learners' needs, aptitudes and learning strategies. Most crucially, what teachers should keep in mind is to respond positively and encouragingly to learners' learning performance so that not to inhibit them. Most crucially, they have to act as:

- “Facilitators” of learning, through carefully planned reading lessons.
- “Evaluator” and “assessor” of learners’ progress by making comments on their overall performance including strength and weaknesses.
- “Assistant”; provide effective assistance whenever necessary by suggesting the most convenient ways of learning.
- “Supporter”; the teacher should promote learners’ self-reliance by encouraging them to work toward autonomy. In this way, learners will develop to the fullest of their ability.

Thus the success of a course depends partially on the way the teacher manages the motivational mechanism inside the classroom. Relying on the different classical and present methods drives teachers to be eclectic in their teaching practices.

Towards Eclecticism in the Arabic language Classroom

Arabic is not an easy language to learn and there is no single method can insure that the proficiency will be achieved without investment of time. The importance and diversity of motivation and needs of learners and objectives of courses have led to a certain pedagogical relativism because of the absence of a unique method for Arabic language teaching/learning for all learners. This is why the Arabic language teacher has to adopt an eclectic approach to his teaching, and the true eclecticist is the teacher who seeks the balanced development of all four skills at all stages, while retaining the emphasis on an oral presentation first. Naturally, the teacher like the method should be flexible (Palmer, 1922) and should use various methods and techniques in his teaching.

These may be considered a highly desirable goal that every teacher should strive to attain in his classroom, keeping in mind: learner-centeredness, the use of accessible techniques to facilitate both language comprehension and learner production and collaborative teaching and learning. This demands that the teacher cease playing the simplistic role of “transmitter of knowledge” and the learner that of

“receiver of knowledge”. Instead, his role is to facilitate the process of language acquisition through the development of appropriate learning strategies. Thus, eclecticism selects and adopts what is good from other methods and rejects what presents difficulties or is culturally unsuitable to the educational context considered.

General Recommendation

For Teachers

Considering the fact that language transforms individuals from a human group into a cohesive cultural community, and considering the noble link of Arabic language to the Islamic religious faith and the Arab Islamic heritage, the linguistic and cultural homogeneity should become a strategic objective for Arab speakers from all races, and a trustworthy guardian of the very constituents of the Arab and Islamic identity. Based on these premises, the Arabic Language teachers when exercising their noble mission of teaching generations this language have first and most to:

- * Promote trust in Arabic language and have feelings of pride for it with the view to safeguarding the entity of the students as speakers of the language, consolidate its identity and existence. Have esteem for and take care of the Arabic Islamic heritage, and highlighting its role in the human civilization.
- * Expand the dissemination of language through various means. Value and support all the efforts made in that direction at the level of states, organizations, academies and individuals. Give opportunity for additional concern to the wide spreading of Arabic as a language, a culture and a civilization. Enhance the link with other teachers at the national, regional and international levels with the view to developing the expansion of the Arabic language and the Islamic culture in terms of quantity and quality.
- * Develop a strategy for expanding the teaching of Arabic language and elaborate a comprehensive plan for giving attention to Arabic in educational curricula and their teaching materials and the helping method for its expansion at all levels.

For Authority Makers

Every Arab government, regardless of its political or social character, uses the symbolic power of the Arab language in its drive toward national modernization, authentication, and uniformization. All of them see the Arabization of society, particularly the educational system, as crucial to their mission. On their parts authority makers should stress the inclusion of the following elements in any action plan:

1. Adequate curricula and elaborate teaching devices for the various educational stages, which take into consideration individual contexts, satisfies learner needs and make the best of the potentials and the technologies of the modern era.

2. Relying on the results of modern linguistic studies in designing curricula and writing teaching material and giving consideration to the actual and expected problems while benefiting from previous research and studies in this area.
3. The good scientific, moral and professional preparing of the Arabic language teacher. Honouring him and giving him material and moral incentives for making beneficial performances. He should also be provided with job care likely to make him discharge his duty of servicing the Arabic language culture and civilization.
4. The need to relay, in the teaching Arabic language, on the modern Audio- visual media, language laboratories, listening equipments, video cassettes, visual slides, CDs, using satellite technology for spreading language through distance learning programs and benefiting from other experiences in all areas with the view to knowing the strategies, ways, methods and techniques of learning.
5. Giving concern to the learner centered learning process, which takes into account individual circumstances, and special categories.
6. Promoting the Arabic book by all means and encouraging the creation of national associations for safeguarding and defending the Arabic language, and commending the Association for defending Arabic language in Algeria and the other Arabic countries.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to propose alternative and, hopefully, useful recommendations to tackle teachers needs as far as the new inculcated Competency Based Approach is concerned. Since failure in acquiring the Arabic language is found to be closely related to the teaching/learning of this language in general, it seemed relevant to reconsider some of the teaching and learning parameters and crucial variables. The recommendations relate to new teacher's roles in the light of significant educational changes that have occurred at the national and international levels; namely, the coming in force of learner centered education and the advocacy of learner autonomy in learning.

Therefore, teachers have to master their responsibilities and tasks in order to bring about learners' autonomy and progress. The ultimate aim would be not only to improve the teaching/learning of the Arabic language, but also to introduce cross cultural learning, and so contribute to a global education.

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