

Teaching Arabic through Modern Methodology: An Experimental Study

Mr. A. M. Ali Ibrahim Jamali^{1*} Dr. P. S. Syed Masood Jamali²

¹ Assistant Professor and Research Scholar, School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

² Dean, School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract – The significance of teaching the Arabic language cannot be underestimated as there are about 315 million speakers of Arabic across the world. It is the official language of over 26 countries and one of the official languages of the United Nations. People around the world revere Arabic and consider it as sacred since it is the language of the Holy Quran. It is a language of religion and science and it has been taught across the globe from religious schools to Western universities.

In India, there are many universities and colleges where the Arabic language is taught. But the methodology of teaching differs from one institution to another. In the last two decades, there have been several studies in developing suitable ways for teaching Arabic to non-Arabs and it is found that most schools and universities in various states of India still adhere to the old teaching methods.

In Tamilnadu, teaching Arabic has taken a new dimension due to the emergence of some modern Arabic Colleges. In this regard, Bukhari Aalim Arabic College located in Chennai plays a vital role in teaching and developing communication skills in Arabic in an innovative way. The main focus of this research is to examine the curriculum, syllabus and Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) adopted in this college and evaluate the successful implementation of the same to enable the students to excel in reading, writing and speaking in Arabic.

Keywords Arabic Language, Bukhari Aalim Arabic College, Teaching Methodology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is a semitic language originating from the Arabian Peninsula. It is one of the oldest languages in the world with a wealth of knowledge that Archeologists have been trying to uncover till today. According to Ethnologue website, more than 315 million people speak this language across the globe. It is also one of the official languages of the United Nations and the religious language of every Muslim in this world.

Arabic is taught in many Universities and colleges in India. But most of the Arabic learners are lacking in effective communication skills in Arabic due to the ineffectiveness of the teaching methodology followed. It is the known fact that the teaching methodology plays an important role in transmitting knowledge and skills to learners. The effectiveness of both knowledge and skills depends greatly on the methodology used. This rule is applicable to all languages. As far as a foreign language like Arabic is

concerned, it needs more meticulous methodology. Recent studies in this field reveal that methodologies like reading, translation and memorization remain popular in the teaching and learning process of the Arabic language starting from schools to higher learning institutions.

This paper discusses the history of the Arabic language and its development in India in general. It also discusses methodologies adopted for teaching Arabic with a special focus on the curriculum, syllabus, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) incorporated in Bukhari Aalim Arabic College, Chennai for developing communication skills in Arabic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers in this field have been exploring new methodologies for teaching communication skills since the 1970s. Later in the 1970s to 1990s, classical communicative language teaching began

to spread replacing traditional approaches which focus on grammar. During this particular phase, attention shifted to gaining communicative competence. It is argued that language learning is more than gaining grammatical competence but knowledge and skills are needed to use grammar and other aspects of language appropriately for different communicative purposes.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was accepted with enthusiasm in 1970s and 1980s (Richard, 2006). The purpose of Communicative Language Teaching is to help students to construct proper sentences and communicate with others. The construction of language components is enhanced not only based on speaking skills but it also integrates other multiple skills, such as listening and writing. To help students to communicate, teachers need to provide them with rich and authentic inputs. In CLT, the meaning of the sentences is more important than its formation, but it does not mean that grammar is not important. Teachers should teach grammar within contexts and through communicative tasks. In this way, grammar is not presented as a list of rigid rules, but natural patterns that students acquire in the learning contexts.

Similarly, Bygate (1987:1) says that Foreign Language teaching is to prepare the learners to use the language. He further stresses that learners should be able to speak confidently in order to carry out many of their most basic transactions. As for Arabic speaking skill, it prepares learners with skills to apply those contents in speaking. In other words, they are interdependent. So, in order to be good speakers of Arabic, language learners should be able to master both speaking and writing skills in Arabic.

Bygate (1987:2) affirms these ideas, as he states that there are other things involved in speaking, namely knowledge of what to speak. He further elaborates that speaking skill comprises two elements: oral as well as interaction skills. The former cannot stand alone as analogically it is like learning to drive without ever going out on the road. The oral skill refers to the 'content' meant by the student. It includes grammar, vocabulary, and so on. The interaction skill, however, refers to the skill of using those contents in speaking; for example, how to communicate to different kinds of people, how and where to use certain terms and phrases and so on. Thus, speaking requires knowledge and skills.

It is true that memorization is a popular method of teaching and learning the Arabic language. In fact, this traditional method is considered as the foundation to understand Arabic texts. However, studies have shown that different subject matters demand different teaching methodologies. Bygate (1987:3) stresses that a fundamental difference is that while both can be understood and memorized, only skill can be imitated and practiced. Memorization is, indeed, a very useful method.

However, for long-term retention and recall, it might be less effective.

The teacher should be willing to change his role into a facilitator instead of a teacher or instructor. A communicative teacher requires extraordinary abilities: multi-dimensional, confident and judicious. In addition to that, the lesson should be prepared with a learner-centric approach. Everything in the lesson from planning, deciding, and participating should involve students. Pertaining to the text used, it could be a resource for interaction rather than merely for reading, translating, and memorizing. It is stressed that the communicative approach is necessary to train the learners using the language functionally.

This paper provides the details of teaching methodology in Arabic followed in India and it further discusses the modern communicative language teaching approach adopted in Bukhari Aalim Arabic College to enhance the communication skills in Arabic.

3. HISTORY OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

The Arabic language is richest in grammatical rules, literature and culture. It was studied and developed even before the birth of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh). The Arabs were proud of the fluency of their language and revered the poets and speakers. The Arabic language was enormously developed under the shadow of Islam as the scholars had written numerous books on Quranic interpretation, jurisprudence and other topics in Arabic. The linguists had begun to gather the standard the Arabic language, its terminologies and various dialects from the inhabitants of the deserts and the villages. In the due course of time, Arabic grammar also evolved.

During Abbasid caliphate, Greek philosophy and other sciences were translated into Arabic so that the language became resounding for artistic and technical meanings. Hence, Arabic became the language of religion and culture on the one hand and the language of science on the other hand. It became a reference in astronomical, medical, meteorological, accounting, chemical and nature sciences from the seventh century AD to the beginning of the European Renaissance in the sixteenth century AD. In fact, the Arabic language played a vital role as the means of the European Renaissance.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN INDIA

When the development of the Arabic language in the Indian subcontinent is reviewed, it is found that due care was taken for its evolution and was preserved as the language of science, culture and

civilization. Though the political relations between India and the Arab world were first established in the seventh century, the trade relations between them date back to the ancient times or perhaps prehistoric times as far in the past as 50 CE. Trade relations flourished and persisted between them as two of the three routes by which trade was carried on in ancient times between India and the West passed through Arabia. Thus, the entire Arab world was strategically situated in terms of trade playing a vital role in strengthening relations between India and the Arab world.

Indians may have learnt some words of Arabic through Arab traders during their early trade visit. But after the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, India had begun the substantial and sustained contact with the Arabic language. Subsequently, learning and teaching of Arabic started in a considerable way which continued to flourish further with the passage of time.

5. TEACHING METHODOLOGY OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN INDIA

A huge number of Arabic religious schools and institutes were established and they have made remarkable efforts in the dissemination of religious sciences and Arabic literature with a focus on grammatical rules. But in those institutes, proper measures were not taken for the development of the Arabic language, its teaching methodology and curricula, where they study the subjects of Islamic Studies in the translation to regional languages.

Despite better facilities and materials, an improved curriculum, qualified and trained teachers, the problems remain the same. The teaching and learning process of the Arabic language in India focuses inordinately on the communicative and religious aspects. The communicative domain is evident in the objectives of the Arabic language curriculum. However, this is not transparent in practice.

It is also found that there is little pedagogical difference in strategies of teaching communicative Arabic. Traditional methodologies such as memorization, reading and grammar-translation were also conflated with the teaching of Communicative Arabic as observed. It is also found that all subjects in Arabic are not designed to serve communicative purposes. The focus has always been to understand Arabic grammar and comprehension. Students were only exposed indirectly to Arabic speaking during other lessons like Insha' (Essay writing) and Maqalah (comprehension). On top of that, speaking skills are not assessed orally in the exams. Furthermore, the time allocated for teaching Communicative Arabic was limited. It is a commonly held belief among teachers that using the communicative approach will

impede the teaching pace and delay the completion of the syllabus.

It is almost impossible to alter teaching methodologies because of the time constraint. To aggravate the issue, during the teaching of Arabic subjects, the local language is predominantly used. This is an important reason for the lack of language skills among students in Arabic institutes in India. It may be suggested that such practice was due to the teachers' poor command of Arabic speaking skills. But still, some teachers spend efforts to make the lessons more interactive and encourage students' participation.

However, the teaching of the Arabic language in India is not congruent with the objectives. It is suggested that the use of communicative, functional and religious approaches replacing the current modalities to encourage students to acquire communicative competence through continuous practice in the classroom.

6. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO BUKHARI AALIM ARABIC COLLEGE

In the southern state of Tamilnadu, more traditional Arabic colleges are found. Baqiyyathus Saliath Arabic College, Vellore was established in 1885 and it was followed by Jamalia Arabic College, Chennai in 1898. Currently, there are more than 100 Arabic colleges in Tamilnadu, which follow the curriculum of the oldest syllabus which is called as 'Nizami Syllabus'. They are following a systematic approach in teaching the Arabic language and there is no much scope to develop Arabic language skills.

In the last twenty years, some new Arabic colleges have been established which combine the good old Islamic sciences and the new useful modern sciences. The approaches which are followed in these colleges are better than the parched systematic approach followed in other Arabic colleges. These Arabic colleges pay more attention to the Arabic language to an extent that even the medium of teaching is made as Arabic. Hence Arabic has been transformed into a live language.

The first of these institutions is Bukhari Aalim Arabic College, located at Crescent Campus, Vandalur, Chennai. It was founded in the year 2000 A.D. by Alhaj Dr. B.S. Abdur Rahman, one of the leading businessmen of international trade and industry from South India. He was determined to establish an institution in which students can study religious and secular sciences together so that each student will be graduated in both the spheres.

As a prelude to the preparation of the new curriculum for this College, a committee specialized in Arabic and Islamic studies analyzed the

curriculum in various institutes, especially in Tamilnadu, Kerala and the northern states of India. In addition to that, the Committee visited some Islamic universities in Arab countries such as Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah, Al-Azhar University in Cairo and the International Islamic University of Africa in Khartoum, Sudan. Based on this guidance received through the exchange of views among experts in the field of education in these universities, the draft was prepared for the syllabus contrary to the curriculum prevailed in the traditional Arabic Colleges in Tamilnadu and implemented the same in Bukhari Aalim Arabic College. The Committee also decided that the curriculum should be changed according to the modern requirements regularly and it must be reformed and renewed every now and then incorporating the necessary changes.

This college has become School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, one of the Schools in B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and technology in the year 2010 after ten years of teaching experience in Arabic and Islamic sciences. It offers U.G., P.G. and research degree programmes in Arabic and Islamic Studies.

6.1. Teaching methodology adopted in Bukhari Aalim Arabic College

According to National Capital Language Resource Center of the United States (NCLRC) the idea of foreign language teaching and learning, including the Arabic language is to accomplish communication goals. In other words, the “desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does”. Communicative competence includes “knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions, knowing how to vary usage of language according to the setting and the participants, knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts and knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge”. (Richards, 2006)

Therefore it is crucial for language teachers and learners to be able to distinguish between learning a language and learning about the language. Bukhari Aalim Arabic College incorporated the above definitions in its curriculum and teaching methodology. The syllabus also emphasizes that the teaching methodology employed in the classroom should be able to develop the learning skills in line with other language skills.

In addition, the teachers and learners also need to recognize that “interpretive skills (listening, reading) develop much more quickly than expressive skills (speaking, writing), and the ability that students covet most; the ability to speak the second language fluently requires the longest period of growth” (NCLRC). So the goal of the teachers in this college

to make sure that the students learn the vocabulary and grammatical rules of Arabic in a simple manner.

Bygate mentioned that “one of the basic problems in foreign language teaching is to prepare learners to be able to use the language” (Bygate, 1987: 4). He suggested that teachers must understand the goals of language teaching and learning properly, know what it takes to achieve the desired goals and prepare the language course accordingly to ensure the goals become reality. In addition, teachers should be able to understand the effects of the methodology used. The teachers of Bukhari Aalim Arabic College keep these points in mind and put into practice.

6.2 Salient features of Bukhari Aalim Arabic College in teaching the Arabic language

Bukhari Aalim Arabic College gives great importance in teaching the Arabic language and follows the modern tools and techniques proposed to teach to non – native speakers. The important approach followed is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Arabic is taught from the basic to the students in a modern and simple way so that all the students will be able to follow the lectures in Arabic and converse among them fluently.

CLT is properly implemented to ensure that the student can speak and write Arabic fluently within a year. After that, Arabic literature is taught along with Arabic grammar and rhetoric using advanced methods. To cope up with that, the medium of instruction from the second year is made as Arabic.

As already mentioned, the committee which was constituted before the establishment of this Arabic college visited various universities and reviewed the curricula of teaching the Arabic language to non-Arab speakers. Especially, the curricula developed by Umm Al-Qura University and the International Islamic University of Africa. Besides this, the Committee also reviewed the book “Duroos Al Lughathil Arabiyya Li Ghair An Naatqeena Biha” (Arabic language Lessons for Non- Arab Speakers) written by Dr. Abdul Rahim which is considered as the best teaching material for teaching Arabic.

After careful study of the curricula of the above mentioned three study materials, the Committee proposed to include all three of them in the curricula of Bukhari Aalim Arabic College. It is a well-known fact that in other Arabic colleges and institutions one book or one curriculum will be followed for teaching Arabic, but Bukhari Aalim Arabic College is teaching the students each of the books or curricula mentioned simultaneously to intensify the efforts of students in learning the Arabic language.

The book, 'Al Qirathul Arabiyya Lil Muftadiyeen' (Arabic for beginners) published by University of Umm al-Qura, Makkah and the book 'Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika' (Arabic is in before you) follow Communicate Language Teaching Approach (CLT) as they are developed by native Arabic speakers. But the book "Duroos Al Lughathil Arabiyya Li Ghair An Naatiqeena Biha" written by Dr. Abdul Rahim is distinguished in terms of sentences and phrases, where it is easier for beginners to follow lessons from grammar, although the book does not directly teach grammatical rules. Bukhari Aalim Arabic College has brought both the methodologies together for the feasibility of the students. Thus the students will be able to develop their Arabic language skills and follow the grammatical rules.

In addition to teaching the Arabic language in the classroom, the college has imposed on its students to converse in Arabic among themselves inside the campus and preserve the atmosphere of the Arabic language.

6.3 Exclusive Curriculum for teaching Arabic in Bukhari Aalim Arabic College

TABLE

Year	First Semester	Second Semester
First year	i) Duroos Al Lughathil Arabiyya Li Ghairin Naatiqeena Biha (First Part) ii) Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika (First part) iii) Al Qirathul Arabiyya Lil Muftadiyeen (First half of First part)	i) Duroos Al Lughathil Arabiyya Li Ghairin Naatiqeena Biha(Second Part) ii) Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika (Second part) iii) Al Qirathul Arabiyya Lil Muftadiyeen (Second half of First part) iv) An Nahwul Waadhih - Primary (First Part) v) Qisas An Nabiyyeen (First Part) vi) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory
Second Year	i) Duroos Al Lughathil Arabiyya Li Ghairin Naatiqeena Biha (Second and Third Part) ii) Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika (Second part) iii) An Nahwul Waadhih - Primary (Second Part) iv) Qisas An Nabiyyeen (Second Part) v) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory	i) Duroos Al Lughathil Arabiyya Li Ghairin Naatiqeena Biha (Third Part) ii) Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika (Second part) iii) Qisas An Nabiyyeen (Second Part) iv) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory
Third year	i) Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika (Third part) ii) An NahwulWaadhih - Primary (Third Part) iii) Qisas An Nabiyyeen (Third Part) iv) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory v) Training in Arabic Typing	i) Al Arabiyya BainaYadaika (Fourth part) ii) A Nahwul Waadhih - Secondary (First Part) iii) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory iv) Training in Arabic Typing
Fourth Year	i) Al Arabiyya Baina Yadaika (Fifth part) ii) An Nahwul Waadhih - Secondary (Second Part) iii) Al Balagha Al Waadhiha iv) Al Mukhtarat Minal Adabil Arabi v) Majmootaun Min an Nadm vi) Kaleela wa Dimnah vii) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory	i) Al Arabiyya BainaYadaika (Sixth part) ii) A Nahwul Waadhih - Secondary (Third Part) iii) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory
Fifth year	i) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory	i) Translation training in Arabic to English and vice versa ii) Weekly Training in Arabic Oratory

6.4 Features of the program

The unique features of this program as follows:

- I. The courses are arranged in an innovative way that different courses of the Arabic language are taught at the same time. In this

way, intensified efforts are found in teaching and learning of the Arabic language and the students' minds are filled with methods of conversation in Arabic, vocabulary and the logical formation of the sentences. This method continues in each semester of each year.

- II. ICT enabled classrooms are used to teach Arabic vocabulary and to develop communication skills. Various videos are shown to enhance pronunciation and speaking skills.
- III. One of the courses of this syllabus is teaching 'An Nahwul Waadhih', the book on the grammatical rules in Arabic, gradually from the second semester till all the six parts are completed.
- IV. This approach includes training students in writing and oratorical skills in Arabic from the third year as each student prepares for weekly sermons by choosing a special subject, collecting the relevant matters regarding the chosen topic and arranges it in an appropriate order and then delivers it before other students in the devoted periods for oratory training.
- V. This syllabus includes teaching Arabic literature.
- VI. The final year of the study includes training in the art of translation from Arabic to English and vice versa

6.5 Contribution of the college to the development of the Arabic language

It is no secret to the writers and researchers on the huge contributions of this college and its great efforts to preserve the Arabic language and literature. A large number of skilled graduates who have been graduated from this college are playing an important role in the enrichment and development of the Arabic language. As the younger generation, they learn and teach the Arabic language and spread their literature to all corners of the world.

In the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, the following facilities are available:

- I. A Centre for Arabic Language.
- II. A library consists of rare Arabic books
- III. A separate section for online educational resources.

IV. An auditorium for lectures in Arabic and oratorical training for students.

The Center trains the teachers of the Arabic language from other institutions in cooperation with competent authorities inside and outside the country. Arabic teachers and prominent scholars from all over the country are visiting and delivering valuable lectures in Arabic to teachers and students on different topics to activate their talents towards the Arabic language. This centre also conducts cultural seminars, language workshops, national and international conferences to improve the level of the Arabic language education in India. A wall journal in Arabic is also published every month.

In general, Bukhari Aalim Arabic College has played a prominent role in teaching the Arabic language and developing it through the modern methods chosen for non-native speakers especially, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach. It is tangible from the curricula, which enable the student to speak and write Arabic fluently within a short span of time. The students are trained to practice conversing in Arabic with the other students and teachers. The College also makes sure that the students prepare for the oratory in Arabic. Then, the modern Arabic literature is taught by a group of skilled professors. The grammatical and rhetorical rules are also taught using sophisticated methods. Thus, the student acquires all the required skills in Arabic at the end of his study in this college.

CONCLUSION

In India, there are a large number of religious schools and institutes that have played a remarkable role for more than a century in the dissemination of religious sciences and Arabic literature with a focus on grammatical rules. However, they did not give enough care in the development of the Arabic language and its teaching methods, as they teach the sciences from the Holy Quran, Sunnah, Fiqh and doctrines in the way of translation into regional languages. Bukhari Aalim Arabic College has focused its efforts on developing the skills of the Arabic language to the students and implemented intensive programs to teach dialogue, writing and Arabic grammar, rhetoric as well as Islamic sciences in Arabic by implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This college has become a model educational institution for the development of the Arabic language in India.

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Corresponding Author

Mr. A. M. Ali Ibrahim Jamali*

Assistant Professor and Research Scholar, School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, B.S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

aliibrahimjamali@crescent.education