

# Determining an Effective Interactive Multimedia Arabic Language Courseware for Malaysian Primary School Children: An Alternative Paradigm for Learning in the Classroom.

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## Introduction

The prime purpose of this experimental research was to determine an effective interactive multimedia Arabic Language Courseware to teach Arabic as a foreign Language for Malaysian 3<sup>rd</sup> grade primary school children. This research attempted to critically analyze the feasibility of shifting the paradigm of face to face teaching of Arabic Language in the classrooms to that of a state of the art learning environment. (Mayer, 2003). As such, this inquiry has critically evaluated the effectiveness of traditional methodology in teaching the Arabic Language in Malaysian classrooms.

Study claims that, Arabic Language can be mastered more meaningfully if instructors utilize sounds, patterns, gestures, symbols and blend multimedia in their everyday lessons. (Wikipedia, 2006). Computer mediated teaching methods not only provide opportunities for the teachers to prepare excellent instructions, but it also paves the way for more challenging and more meaningful learning environments. Learning and teaching do not happen in isolation. It involves a learning plan and student- instructor collaboration.

To expose learners to a fruitful and critical thinking session, there are varieties of techniques which can be implemented by an instructor to encourage positive learning outcomes. One such positive engagement is to teach through a storytelling session. Storytelling learning environments help to improve learners' listening skills, thinking skills and language abilities (Speaker, 2000). Experts have confirmed that teachers should promote critical thinking and problem solving skills in the class, rather than forcing students to memorize mere facts. By feeding too many facts into the students' memories, they can find only a limited amount of time to understand the subject (DiCarlo, 2006). Traditionally speaking, teachers often lectured behind closed doors, shying away from the blessing of multimedia (Shulman & Richard, 1992).

The role of the teacher in a traditional setting is to give orders and to ask the students to follow him or her in bitter silence. “*Good teaching means the teacher must: (i) be knowledgeable in her/his discipline, (ii) show enthusiasm in teaching, (iii) emphasize concepts and critical thinking, (iv) encourages question from the students, and (v) be caring to her/his students*”. (Ali, 2005). Instructors should bear in mind that learning occurs when students are motivated (Barbuto, 2006). Students must be given the choice to learn cooperatively and at the same time they must be encouraged to participate in class activities without fear and humiliation (Bruner, 1996).

## **The Problem Statements**

The majority of foreign language classes are taught with little or no regards with the current field-tested paradigm of foreign language acquisition. Many teachers are using almost outdated paradigms of learning for their students (Sebelius, 2002). This situation is unproductive for a fast growing learner who wants to acquire knowledge. As such, this initiative investigated the notion that the teaching methodology used for Arabic as a foreign language in the classrooms. The concept of chalk and talk has affected the progress of our young (Hyde & Thomas 2005). If this notion persists to dominate our classrooms, it is sad to note that, this problem will definitely continue into the future. Study indicated that foreign language teaching has evolved from a grammar-centered methodology to that of a communication and an accomplishment based technique. There is no doubt that, the Arabic Language has an exceptional position in Islam (Hooker, 1999). Allah *Ta’ala* has chosen the Arabic Language as an effective medium of communication for His message. Arabic is not only a language per se, but a language that has been chosen by Allah *Ta’ala* to communicate to His servants (Coffman, 1995)

Allah *Ta’ala* says in the Quran: Verily, *We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran in order that you may understand* (Al-Quran:96:1. 2001). In fact, Allah *Ta’ala* is directly telling us that learning the Arabic Language is very crucial in understanding His message. Indeed, in order to understand the beauty of the Quran, the revelation through which Allah has sent down His Messages, one must put learning the Arabic Language as the first priority (Al-Quran:96:1. 2001). Learners of the Arabic Language perceive that Arabic is a difficult subject. As such, the instructors ought to plan their instruction meaningfully for an effective knowledge transfer. Study (Diamantes, 2007) indicates that a good teacher should have the following effective teaching methodology in mind; qualities like outcome, clarity, engagement, and enthusiasm. The instructors ought to use field-tested theories of teaching in order to teach the Arabic Language effectively. The quality of instructions should never be compromised (Kidd & Stamatakis, 2006).

## Research Background

Instructors must realize that to enhance the teaching methods they must blend multimedia to their teachings in order to gain students' attention (Ashton & Zalzal, 2004). The quality of instruction must not be compromised. Using technology and multimedia not only motivates learners, but it also enhances their performance in the classroom (Catley, 2005). Study points out that learners ought to speak the language with each other and fully understand each other's diverse culture in order to learn the language (Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender & Sandrock 2006). Teachers teaching foreign language have to make sure that their instructions are comprehensible by their students.

One way to comprehend is to use students' first language to illustrate those difficult terms and phrases of the new language to make sure that learners actually understand the difficult terms (Kraemer, 2006). Research has shown that Arabic Language is a very difficult subject and requires significant instructional planning (Jassem, 2000). Study continues to claim that instructors need thousands of contact hours with their students to teach Spanish and French languages at a basic everyday level of understanding. However, the Arabic Language requires four to five times more contact hours compared to Spanish and French just to learn the basics of communication (Kennedy, 2006). As such, careful planning and motivation is an important component of any educational learning. We all learn because we are motivated (Aydin, 2005).

According to (Kennedy, 2006) the basic points for teaching a foreign language are summarized as "*Language processing involves many senses, including vision, both in early infancy and in adulthood. Time and age are critical factors that affect the processes associated with language acquisition. Enriched environments promote neuronal development. We use our emotions to tell us what is important to learn and what to remember*". The brain stores information based on functionality and meaningfulness. Emotions drive attention. Attention drives learning and memory" (Kennedy, 2006). When designing educational activities for students, research has indicated that it is the prime responsibility of the instructor to plan creatively in order to know how to deliver and most importantly when to deliver. Teacher must provide adequate support like modeling, coaching, scaffolding and choosing the right kind of support to facilitate learning (Buseti, Dettori, Forcheri, & Ierardi 2007).

Research has concluded that instructors who teach the foreign language must be trained to use proper method of instructions in the classroom (Colville & O'Connor, 2006). Notably, instructors have to use big format books with text printed on them in a manner that are highly visible and readable to the learners. Evidence also suggests that these techniques are very useful especially for the primary school learners who want to learn a new language (Liao, 2001). Established studies suggest that apart from the methodological aspects of teaching a foreign language, instructors have to blend interactive multimedia into their everyday instructions in the classroom in order to achieve significant improvement of knowledge transfer (Ray & Seely, 2002). As such, computer assisted courseware has the potential of helping learners to acquire a foreign language more easily and effectively (Liao, 2001). Moreover, compelling evidence demonstrates the practical applications of interactive multimedia as an effective tool for learning a new language (Schackne, 2002).

Study shows that the most challenging aspect of teaching a language is to deliver the right information at the right time to the right person (Adamchik & Gunawardena, 2005). As such, in teaching a foreign language, instructors have to inculcate the love of the language among the learners. Learners must be provided with the kind of learning environment which allows learners to develop their own thinking skills and individualized ideas about learning (Church, 2006).

Teachers not only instill the love of a new language among the learners, but for themselves also. Teachers must be motivated to teach the new language. Teachers can be motivated to teach effectively if they are given autonomy to make critical decisions about what to teach, how to teach and when to teach. They must be able to introduce the best methods of teaching to their students (Carolyn, Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). Study reveals that, effective instruction of a new language, such as foreign language requires creativity and accountability on the part of the teacher and accountability and self-assessment on the part of the learner. Study further indicates that, learners learn through motivation not through punishment like giving them zero grades or refusing to give them a second chance to improve. This measurement does not teach learners to be more accountable and meaningful (Wormelli, 2006). Instructors must realize that rushing to finish the assigned curriculum does not improve productivity in the classroom. Study claims that less is more (Gold, 2006).

Instructors should not force learners to learn beyond their capacity by memorizing mere facts. Instructors in teaching foreign language should contemplate on multidimensional strategies of teaching and must promote the concept of student-centered policy in the classrooms. Teacher ought to introduce cooperative learning among the students in order to succeed in effective knowledge transfer (Willis, 2007). In the process learners will learn from each other's diverse cultures and at the end they will improve their linguistic development rapidly (Alden, 2006). Multicultural understanding can improve linguistic ability and thinking skills. These cultural exposures and their curiosity enhance students' interest in learning a new language. Moreover, instructors play a significant role by being good listeners; undoubtedly this encourages linguistic improvements among the learners. In the process, there will be a community of problem solvers among the potential learners. So that's how learners learn a new language by melting into the sociolinguistic dimensions of a language. After all, learning occurs in a socially packed environment (Freed, Sufumi, Nicole & Lazar.2003).

In short, instructors and educational policy makers have to come to terms with the fact that face-to-face methodology of teaching a new language is not the only best way to achieve language skills (Ingram & Ingram, 2001). Teachers should not wait until learners actually learn the language and only then expose them to the society. Learners need to be exposed to the learning dimensions of a multicultural environment in order to master the language earlier. Instructors must utilize the most important principles of language teaching to achieve fruitful learning outcomes. These principles are explained by (Ingram & Ingram, 2001). as (i) Focus on learners (ii) Focus on use. (iii) Respond to the learners' need and (iv) Focus on social interaction.

## **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will be a breakthrough for the future researchers on the methodology of acquiring Arabic as a foreign language. The finding of this research will contribute for the development of a theory and extends knowledge to the existing research methodology. The result of this study could lead to the enhancement of the traditional methods of teaching the Arabic Language in Malaysian settings. The finding of this research will also help traditional teachers to seriously consider an alternative paradigm of teaching and learning the Arabic Language in their classrooms. It also identifies students' perception and attitudes in learning the Arabic Language. As such, the result of this research provides an opportunity to the instructors to plan their instruction in advance according to the needs of the learners.

## **Objectives**

The prime purpose of this experimental research was to determine whether learning Arabic as a foreign language can be effectively enhanced through traditional methodology. As such, this research carefully investigated and critically analyzed the effectiveness of the traditional paradigm in teaching Arabic as a foreign language to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade primary school children in Malaysia.

As such, this inquiry attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Investigate and critically evaluate the existing traditional methods of teaching the Arabic Language.
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of traditional methodology.

Furthermore, this study will critically evaluate:

- a. Whether children find it difficult to learn the Arabic Language.
- b. Learners' attitudes toward the Arabic Language.

## **Methodology**

In this study the researcher applied a multi level approach of quantitative and qualitative methods in carrying out the investigation. In this inquiry the Arabic Language was taught in a purely traditional setting of face to face learning to 41 students of Sekolah Taman Setia Wangsa Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. The course contents were taken from unit four of the Arabic book of the school syllabus. The Arabic class teacher and 40 school teachers of the above mentioned school were chosen to give their feedback about the traditional methodology of teaching Arabic Language.

## **Instruments**

In order to guarantee the reliability and validity of the instruments in this study, the researcher submitted the instruments to a panel of Linguistic experts, professionals in the Arabic and English Languages for their perusal. Furthermore, a copy of the research questions, problems, goals, objectives and the course outline were also given to these experts for further advice. Feedbacks obtained from the experts were used to strengthen suitability, reliability and validity of the instruments. Instruments used to collect data were (i) Pre-Test & Post-Test that consist of six sections with six questions each.

The types of questions include filling the blanks, one to one matching, writing the missing words, true or false and writing the numbers (ii) A pre-determined checklist was used by the researcher to evaluate students' reactions, facial expression, satisfaction and motivation in the classroom (iii) similar pre-determined checklist also used to examine instructor's fidelity and wakefulness of methodological breakthrough in teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the classroom. The checklist also critically evaluated instructor's methodology of students' evaluation, classroom management, teaching style and the school syllabus relevancy and appropriateness.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher continued observing the traditional environment throughout the six weeks of the Arabic course. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed rigorously using SPSS 12.0. Students were categorized as good, average and fail based on percentage score. T-test was carried out to find if there exist any significant differences between pre and post test score. The researcher then analyzed the observations from the pre-determined checklist.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Pre and post-test evaluation**

Table 1 shows the distribution of students' performance in pre and post-test. There were some improvements in the post-test. More students are in good (12.5%) and average (7.4%) categories compared to their pre-test and less students (19.5%) in fail category after six weeks of the Arabic lessons.

**Table1: Pre and Post-Test performance according to categories**

Category	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Diff%
	N	%	N	%	
Good	3	7.3	8	19.5	12.5
Average	19	46.3	22	53.7	7.4
Fail	19	46.3	11	26.8	19.5

Table 1 indicates that the mean score of the pre-test was 52.44% while the mean score for the post-test was noted at 59.17%. There is a difference of 6.73 marks between the pre and the post-test. Even though the difference is seemingly quite small, the t-test analysis designates that the gain score is fairly significant, with  $t(41) = -2.872, p < 0.05$ .

**Table 2: T-Test analysis on pre and post-test**

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference	t	p
Mean	52.44	59.17	+ 6.73	-2.872	0.007
N	41	41			
S.D.	14.62	16.05	15.01		

Results from table 2 indicate that majority of the students had prior knowledge of the Arabic language. This is conspicuous from their marks. It must be noted that these results may not show their actual knowledge of the Arabic language for the following reasons: (i) Students may have answered the multiple choice questions by merely guessing (ii) Students may have copied from each other as the results show similarities in some answer sheets.

**Table 3: Pre-test and Post-test evaluation**

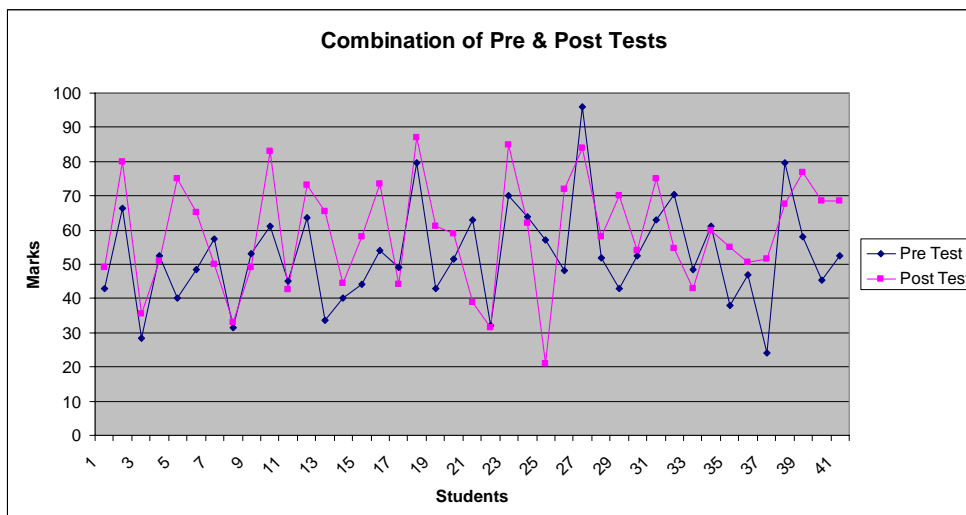


Table 3 designates that thirteen (34%) students scored less in the post-test compared to their pre-test. Five students scored less by 0.5 to 5 marks and eight students scored less by 5 to 36 marks. It is surprising that these students did worse after they were taught the lessons. This could have been due to the use of unproductive methodology or not following proper techniques of teaching the Arabic language in the classroom. The inconsistencies in the scores may have been due to the following reasons as well: (i) Students answers in the pre-test evaluation may be based on memorization of facts and they virtually forgotten the answer in the post test evaluation.

Study indicates that learners remember things with the view of meaning in their minds not facts (Bruner, J. 1996).(ii) Students answers in the pre-test evaluation may be based on their mere guesses and they failed to apply the same techniques in the post-test evaluation and (iii) Students did not do well in the post test probably because of their current state of the mind, class conditions and teaching methodology. About 5 students generally maintained their pre-test scores with marginal improvements (less than the average increment of 7 marks).

### **Observation on students and the Arabic class teacher**

Table 3 insinuates that learners were not motivated to continue learning the Arabic Language in the class. About 73% (8 out of 11) of the responses towards the questions given in the interview were negative. Observations clearly indicated that students were bored and tired while the instructor delivered the lesson. It was unmistakable from their facial articulations.

The learners were not only dissatisfied with the traditional methodology but were not confident whether they could learn the Arabic Language or not. Studies show that once the learners are satisfied with what they are learning, and it is working and benefiting them, they will be satisfied and motivated (Aydin, C.H. 2005).

**Table 4: Outcome of Students Evaluation**

1.	Did the students enter the class in a happy mode?	(No)
2.	Did the students pay attention to the teacher?	(No)
3.	Did the students ask any questions during the lesson?	(No)
4.	Were the students motivated to learn more?	(No)
5.	Did the students retain the lesson and continue to learn?	(No)
6.	Did the students remain happy in the class?	(No)



7.	Did the students understand the lesson?	(Yes)
8.	Did the students complain about class condition?	(Yes)
9.	Were the students confident in the class?	(No)
10.	Did the students annoy the teacher?	(Yes)
11.	Did the students feel important in the class?	(No)

Table 4 clearly indicates that knowledge construction based on traditional method was ineffective to about one-third of the class. About 73% (8 out of 11) of responses in the questionnaires were negative.

The teaching method used in the class was in teacher-centered mode and very far from constructivism approach. Study claims that careful planning is very important for an effective learning outcome (Hall, A. 2006). Motivation is an important component of any educational learning. We all learn because we are motivated (Wikipedia. 2006).

**Table 5: Outcome of Instructor Evaluation**

1.	Did the teacher evaluate the students prior to the new lesson?	(No)
2.	Did the teacher group the students for effective learning?	(Yes)
3.	Did the teacher use scaffolding methodology to help a weak student?	(No)
4.	Did the teacher use any extra materials apart from the daily syllabus?	(No)
5.	Did the teacher allow students to play different roles in the class?	(Yes)
6.	Did the teacher adequately explain the lesson to the students?	(No)
7.	Did the teacher motivate the learners to learn effectively?	(No)
8.	Did the teacher enter the class with a surprise?	(No)
9.	Did the teacher obtain students' attention prior to the delivery?	(No)
10.	Did the teacher make the instruction relevant to the students?	(Yes)
11.	Were the students satisfied with the teacher's instructions?	(No)

Table 5 clearly indicates that teacher centered paradigm of teaching the Arabic Language is ineffective. Study claims that emotions drive attention and attention drives learning (Kennedy, T.J. 2006). The gate keepers of the teacher-centered methodology must come to the term that it is the prime responsibility of the teacher to plan creatively in order to know how to deliver and most importantly when to delivery. Teacher must provide adequate support like modeling, coaching and scaffolding to facilitate effective learning (Busetti, Dettori , Forcheri & Ierardi 2007).

## Conclusion

This research carefully investigated and critically analyzed the efficiency of the face to face method of teaching the Arabic as a foreign language to Malaysian 3<sup>rd</sup> grade school children. Students in traditional settings performed slightly better after six weeks of the Arabic lessons. Even though the average improvement is significant, about one third of the class scored less in their post test compared to the pre-test. Learner's perceptions about content delivery were not so encouraging for the traditional paradigm of teaching the Arabic as a foreign language. Learners were not motivated to continue learning the Arabic Language in the class. Pre-test and post-test evaluations indicated that there were some educational improvements. It is vital to note that the achievements were neither consistent nor significant.

The mean score of the students in pre-test was 52.4% while in the post-test it was noted at 59.2%. However, 34% of the class scored less in their post-test compared to their pre-test. Students in traditional environment performed educationally but not significantly. Evaluation and questionnaires marked that learners' perception about content delivery were not so encouraging for the traditional methodology. Learners were not motivated to learn and continue learning the Arabic Language in the class. The Class observation also indicated that the quality of instruction needs critical attention.

To assure the quality of the instructions and methodology in teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Malaysian classrooms, more in depth studies are needed to appraise the face to face paradigm of teaching the Arabic Language. To guarantee the quality of traditional methods of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Malaysian environment more investigations are necessary in order to critically evaluate delivery mode of the traditional methodology of teaching and learning the Arabic Language.

### Note:

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