

Teaching Arabic as a Second Language (TASL): Simulation of the Canadian/ American exemplary TESL Models. A Feasibility Study in Promoting a Saudi-Owned TASL Programme

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Abstract

Given that teaching Arabic, as a second language has become increasingly significant in the present context, it follows that there is an urgent and pressing need to develop efficient learning tools as well as adequate measuring tools for testing the learner's development. There are numerous problems associated with measuring a learner's proficiency in Arabic in the context of Western cultures. These problems are related to the non-adaptability of measuring tools from one setting into another without taking cultural factors into account. The difficulties faced by scholars in adapting Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) tools to the Saudi context is an example. However, the problems associated with such an adaptation indicate the need for context-specific language acquisition measuring tools. Either currently existing tools such as TESOL need to be radically altered to fit Saudi contexts and requirements, or entirely new tools must be created in order to test the efficacy of language learning in Saudi Arabia. This study aims at a close examination of ways in which existing tests such as TESOL may be adapted or modified to suit the requirements of teachers and learners in the Saudi context. A survey and evaluation of existing tools was followed by developing new tools specifically for Arabic language. It concludes by giving recommendations for proposed modification of existing strategies for Arabic learners that associates the language more directly with functional workplace contexts.

Keywords: Arabic language learning, second language learning, standardised testing, teaching Arabic as a second language (TASL)

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Background

Canada and the USA have been successful in creating a programme to teach English at their countries as well as testing the proficiency of the learners. These programmes became internationally recognized and accepted as a means of measuring the proficiency of English learners.

Multilingual assessments were justified by Gorter and Cenoz (2017) on the basis of a paradigm shift from single language in education to use of languages suitable for daily practices. In modern classrooms, students who speak different languages study in English as a common language. Nevertheless, they communicate with one another in their other languages. This calls for more holistic approaches to language education. However, such holistic approaches and their application in the assessment are rare. The authors provide some innovative examples of development and assessment of multilingual competencies and cross-lingual skills.

However, there are debates on the problems related to the cultural influence of Western countries in teaching English to non-western learners, whose native language is different from English. An interesting case study was presented by Barnawi and Le Ha (2015) on two Saudi teachers who underwent Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programmes and returned to Saudi Arabia. They tried to adapt the knowledge gained from TESOL to Saudi contexts. They used the training to increase the effectiveness of their teaching in Saudi Arabia, particularly in terms of giving learners a strong sense of agency and autonomy. The authors question the enlightening role of TESOL training. In effect, this means, TESOL needs to be modified for application in non-English-speaking countries. It may also indicate that Teaching Arabic as a Second Language (TASL) strategies need to be revamped to fit the requirements of contemporary teachers and learners.

Objectives of the Study

The study has emerged from the need to develop proficient assessment tools to gauge the efficiency of learners of Arabic. In this task, the objectives may be categorized as short-term and long term:

1. Short-term objectives are to investigate the current scenario in Arabic Language Teaching and to assess the efficacy of current teaching-learning methods as well as means of assessment.
2. Long-term objectives are to adapt and implement efficacious methods of teaching Arabic as a second language as well as assessment tools, modifying existing methods to improve them and developing new ones as required.

Research Questions

The study covers two key areas of research, the first being a survey and analysis of existing tools and the second being the criteria for designing and implementation of an efficient assessment model to test the proficiency of a speaker of Arabic as a second language. The research questions may hence be defined accordingly:

1. What are the existing tools for testing the proficiency of a speaker of Arabic as a second language, what are the advantages of these tools that may be carried forward into designing

a newer, more efficient model, and what are the disadvantages that should be made obsolete while designing a new testing system?

2. What, if any, are the desirable characteristics of a new assessment system, and how can it be ensured that the design is successfully implemented?

Literature Review

1. Importance of Language Proficiency Tests

In the current context, it may be observed that there has been a significant increase in the need to develop programmes for Arabic teaching and learning. It can be assumed that Saudi Arabia, with its religious status, rich cultural heritage, and is the homeland of the Arabic language, requires new and progressive ways of teaching Arabic to learners at various levels. Considering the country's vision 2030, which encourages creating more economic opportunities, there may be a greater need for imported human resources, who may need to be trained in the Arabic language skills for their daily life requirements during their long stay in Saudi Arabia. In addition, many people in other countries are interested to learn Arabic for various purposes like job opportunities in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, tourism and trade and business with Gulf countries, making it imperative for pertinent learning tools to be developed. There is also scope for creating a similar programme patterned after the successful TESOL programmes of Canada and the USA to teach Arabic to non-native speakers of Arabic. The case study on two TESOL trained teachers discussed above may be a good example of how the regulations of TESOL may be adapted to the Saudi context.

2. Why TESOL Model?

One of the primary concerns in such a study is that it is difficult to find reliable existing studies that address Arabic teaching and testing programmes. Hence, it is imperative that a newly developed or adapted tool of language testing should be both valid and reliable in order to gain the necessary reputation and marketing for the test. According to Academic Courses (2018), the best TESOL programmes in the USA are offered by AngloLang and Bridge, Liberty Online, Sappo School, Eton Institute and Lumos. AngloLang offers two courses. Teacher Training: Effective Use of Technology in Teaching is meant for teachers to increase their awareness and use of technology in their teaching contexts. It consists of morning sessions of language development and evening sessions on teaching methodologies using technology. There are practical sessions also. The duration of the course is two weeks with an option to choose only one week. The other course, Language and Methodology for Teachers of English is a two-week course aimed at stimulating practical teaching ideas to English teachers. The methodologies taught include vocabulary learning, recording & recycling, learner autonomy, motivating learners to speak, project work in the classroom, the use of drama and role-play and different ways of teaching grammar. Of these motivating learners to speak, project work and drama and role-play may be useful for Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages (TASOL) programmes in countries, where traditional style is prevalent. Teachers from EU countries can avail Erasmus+ funding. Similar funding mechanisms to poor teachers from other countries may be a good idea for TASOL.

Bridge Educational Group conducts TEFL classes. Bridge is the largest TESOL provider in the USA. The TEFL/TESOL courses, the International Diploma in English Language Teaching (IDELT) and the IDELT Online of the Bridge are recognized for college credit. There are Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) online courses for international teachers to study from their homes at their own pace. The 12-week IDELT online course is meant for teachers looking for flexible options in the academic rigor of traditional TEFL courses. There are also many certification programmes. One of them covers TEFL courses with Bridge partners in fourteen countries.

Liberty University online course, Course Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership, prepares teachers to a higher level of educational specialists. These positions are above teaching careers. The course provides specialized preparation for individuals seeking senior-level positions at K-12 or university-level. It is approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (CAEP, 2015). Other details are given to interested individuals directly on the application. Such programmes in TASOL may be useful for preparing senior level officers to administer the programme.

Sappo School has an International Student English programme. The programme is a holistic approach containing both educational philosophy and practical approaches. International view with the learner-centred approach is used. Cultural relevance and individual experience are important components of the programme. The programme is rooted in the belief that citizens in different parts of the world have more similarities than differences and both long-term and short-term mutual and individual interests are important. The programme enhances and accommodates each student in the acculturative process. Both professional and domestic interests of students are accommodated in the course design. Students are placed in holistic settings to achieve this. The programme meets the New York State Education Department Standards. The durations of part-time and full-time courses are different. The stress on cultural aspect is a factor to consider in TASOL model. One of the essential conditions of language learning is the simultaneous engagement with the cultural contexts in which the language is spoken, and such contexts must be taken into consideration when revamping or creating methodologies for language acquisition.

Eton Institute offers a certification course, TESOL Intensive course. It prepares teachers to deal with multi-cultural and multi-lingual classrooms with confidence. The course is suitable for both new and current teachers. The intensive course has a duration of 120 hours including theory, practical and home study. The online component has a TESOL instructor to help overseas students. Lesson planning and practical teaching skills are taught. The multi-cultural and multi-lingual contexts are applicable in the case of TASOL also. For example, when the instructor and learner have different mother tongues, more attention needs to be paid to pedagogical strategies to ensure that the learner develops proficiency in not only the linguistic aspects of the new language but also the cultural contexts and connotations of words.

Lumos has a programme, TESOL/TEFL – English. It has 80 contact hours with classroom components. There is 100% utilization of the classroom for teaching or learning. It includes 5 hours of classroom observation instead of 1-2 hours in the usual programmes. There is also 10 hours of teaching practice for each individual. Guided coaching in lesson planning is offered.

Lecture classes are in the morning and practicals are in the afternoons 2-3 days per week. Classes are held in a forum style, ensuring that personal teaching philosophy, sharing of ideas and learning from their instructors happen in a communicative and collaborative environment. Teaching and learning theories, methods of teaching grammar and other language skills, lesson planning, classroom management, making the classes learner-centered and effective methods of error correction and assessment are taught. Lumos TESL certificate, a TEFL certificate, and an EPT certificate issued by Brigham Young University are awarded to those who pass with at least the minimum requirements. The programme package contains four weeks TESOL course details, tuition, materials, access to laboratory and recording lab, certificates, TESOL online sources. Minimum admission requirements are based on age and scores of TOEFL, TOEIC or EPT. Course content and style of conducting classes can be adapted to TASOL, which lends itself especially well to learner-centric pedagogical strategies and collaborative learning environments.

Canada has very systematic national TESOL policies and strategies. Institutes offering TESOL programmes are recognized (TESOL Canada, 2014) at three levels of standards, from 1 to 3, in the increasing order of hours of theory and methodology from 100, 250 and master programme and minimum of 20 hours of practicals in all cases. These are at the university levels. For levels of K-12 schools, the respective province has the responsibility. The list of approved programmes of different standard levels is numerous in each province and are separate for certification, bachelor-master and doctoral level programmes. The institutions list the minimum qualification requirements for admission, programme requirements, pre-requisites and required courses to attend. Full time or part time programmes, sometimes with more than one option to join and complete the courses, are given by the institute. However, most descriptions are not as detailed as those of the US institutes discussed above. Some indicative topics, derived from websites of some institutes, are as follows: principles of language teaching and learning; linguistic, cognitive and affective factors; and factors which influence teaching/learning. The last set consists of principles of adult education, learning styles, diversity, curriculum and contexts and historical methodologies. It also pays emphasis to lesson planning consisting of needs analysis, outcomes of writing, selection and adaptation of materials, and the need for scaffolding in learning and evaluation. It also looks into language frameworks (Canadian Language Benchmarks, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), teaching methods, teaching the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, the basics, testing and assessment, classroom management, technology-enhanced language learning, culture and learning and personal approaches to professional development. Such a detailed list of course content needs to be prepared for TASOL, too.

There are some, but not all, elements in each of the above TESOL programmes to include in the proposed TASOL programme. Some scholars have made observations about evaluation standards, some developing their own standards and others adopting well-known ones. Brigham Young University, New York State Education Department Standards, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), TESOL Canada standards are some of the commonly adopted standards. When considering TASOL, there are some already existing tests of the Arabic language such as Arabic Language Proficiency Test (ALPT) of Arab Academy and tests of many other agencies. The tests may be direct or online. The ALPT of Arab Academy is a global standard to evaluate the proficiency level in listening comprehension, reading, structure,

writing, and speaking of the Arabic language. The test is in a computer-adaptive format. There are five sections dealing with the five skills with varying durations as required to assess the skill properly, and some are multiple choice, one is open-ended, and one is a test supervised by an Arabic teacher. Online tests are also required to be done in the presence of an Arab Academy approved invigilator. Muslim member countries of Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and Indonesia have recognized ALPT. Additionally, some elements of TESOL may not be applicable to the TASOL model. For example, the contexts in which languages such as English are typically spoken may not always align with those in which Arabic needs to be used.

Hence, it is critically important to create a test that examines the proficiency of a second language learner in any given language. This broader framework must then be examined to understand the ways in which TASOL may be shaped in order to account for the disparate needs of learners at different levels who seek to learn Arabic. Moreover, the economic, as well as pedagogical success of TESOL, makes it an excellent model for simulation in the case of Arabic learning as well as testing.

3. Current Status for Arabic Proficiency Testing Systems.

While there are several noteworthy proficiency tests that already exist, one of the drawbacks is that they are not usually as widely recognized as IELTS or TESOL. The Arabic Language Proficiency Test (ALPT) follows the international model of standardized testing and is designed by the Cairo-based Arabic Academy and endorsed by the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI). It covers Listening Comprehension, Reading, Structure, Writing, and Speaking. Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) and the Arabic Proficiency Test (APT) are also noteworthy. Additionally, institutions such as the University of Central Florida and Eton Institute offer their own proficiency tests focusing on reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that generate a band-score result similar to the IELTS model. The E-TOAFL and Al-Arabiyyah tests are online proficiency tests that have also seen some success. Given the lack of standardisation in these models, which follow different criteria, TASOL will simulate the case of TESOL because there is almost no other test that has the variability to economically and pedagogically target these objectives. Therefore, although ALPT and other tests have existed for some while and have received some recognition from a number of associations and countries, TASOL will act as a rival to ALPT, just as IELTS is a rival to TESOL.

All these tests including ALPT are more tentative than sufficiently rigorous. In the case of ALPT, structure replaces grammar in tests dealing with English and many other languages. Grammatically correct sentences should have correct structure also. It is not clear whether both terms mean the same. How will it be ensured that an Arab invigilator is present in online tests, as there are possibilities of manipulations? Evaluation of open-ended questions is bound to be subjective. If there are more questions which require descriptive answers, there could be significant subjectivity in assessment. Compared to many other languages, the Arabic language has certain peculiarities, which are culturally significant, as writing from right to left. Therefore, proficiency in the Arabic language is intimately related to the cultural dimension. However, this will not be assessed in the ALPT. If it is also assessed, perhaps, non-Muslims may shy away from learning the language. Theoretically, it may be possible for the newly proposed TASOL to have two dimensions: one for Muslims, in which the cultural dimension is strongly present in the lessons

and tests and the other for non-Muslims, in which the stress is only on Arabic as a language just as any other language; the proficiency tests will also be different for the two dimensions. However, in practice, it may be virtually impossible to separate the religious connotations from the language. Indeed, it must be considered whether attempting to do so is even viable, given that many learners want to acquire the language for religious reasons.

Referring to the ‘prestigious’ status of Arabic all over the world given its association with religion, Gebril and Taha-Thomure (2014) provide a strong reason for the improvement of existing testing methodologies by observing that the number of Arabic speakers in the USA has increased over seven times between 1998 and 2009. Additionally, they recognize the need to differentiate between the teaching and learning of Arabic as a second language as opposed to a first language. Analysing the assessment of Arabic as a foreign language in countries such as the USA, they point out that in many cases, proficiency in the given language becomes a matter of practical urgency and importance, given that in professions such as the military, proficiency may be the basis on which promotions and pay hikes are based. Further, they also suggest that due to the diglossic nature of the language, there may be a significant difference between linguistic and cultural competencies in knowing the language.

Clark (2010), describing the development of the Arabic Computerised Assessment of Proficiency (CAP), points out that it is a proficiency-oriented test that focuses on the successful performance of tasks that require the use of language. The ‘real world’ contexts of language learning are therefore highlighted, suggesting that online assessments may not be the best way to assess language proficiency: indeed, that they may not be adequate at all in assessing whether the learner is ready to successfully perform ‘real world’ tasks requiring the use of the language. Clark’s report primarily indicates the need for technological assessment tools mainly at the preliminary assessment level and suggests that experienced teachers be assigned to assess proficiency levels at more advanced stages.

Ramzi and Al-Hasan (2016) present a case study of how the problem of the lack of standardized assessment tools was addressed at Al-Arqam Islamic School. First, their study suggests that assessing a learner throughout a significant amount of time would be most beneficial: a concern that, of course, cannot be addressed at all through the avenue of standardized online assessments, especially ones with multiple choice questions. A second interesting issue raised by the study is that on occasion, teachers feel threatened by standardized tests since they are often considered a measure of the teacher’s efficiency, even to the extent that they sometimes help students cheat to get better scores on the tests and thereby present a performance that reflects the teacher in a better light than if they were to fail. Again, this practice suggests the inefficacy of objective-type questions, where it is easier to fool the system to obtain better grades.

In sum, the existing research in the area does bring out the lack of efficacious assessment tools to test the proficiency of second language learners of Arabic. However, it also indicates the availability of existing resources that may be adapted or modified to suit the requirements. Additionally, it strongly suggests that both technological tools and the experience and knowledge of educators be taken into account while proposing new models of teaching-learning and

assessment. Finally, some critical issues to be considered while designing testing tools are noted in the next section.

Methodology

The primary methodology used to conduct the study has been to examine existing projects as case studies. The examination of different testing methods and assessment tools in disparate contexts has led to an informed understanding of various scenarios in which tools may be developed and implemented.

In addition, this research has also attempted to include an awareness of the different steps to be considered while creating a model of assessment. For instance, the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of Washington (Centreforteachingandlearning, 2019) has presented a list of guidelines for constructing assessment tools (2018), which includes the following points to note:

1. It must be noted that the reasons for testing may not always be the same; therefore, it is important to consider what the test results will be used for. E.g., assessing the learner's proficiency in the language, their suitability for employment, etc.
2. Ensuring that consistency is maintained between the different kinds of learning a student has been provided with and the types of questions asked on the test.
3. Selecting the appropriate testing method (multiple choice, essays etc) for the learning objectives and assessment criteria.
4. Ensuring that students have adequate preparation methods so that the terms and conditions of the test are not biased.
5. Students must be clear about the expected outcomes of the test.
6. Questions must be designed in such a way that the test allows learners from different ranges of knowledge and expertise to demonstrate their proficiency in the language.

Justification for this paper

The objective of this paper is to propose a programme that deals with Teaching Arabic as a Second Language (TASOL) that is adapted from Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). TESOL combines both teaching contexts of EFL (TEFL) and ESL (TESL). The TOEFL test is designed to measure basic linguistic and pedagogical knowledge within the context of teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in elementary or secondary schools and is done in collaboration with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, Inc. (CAEP) in the case of USA. The TASOL model, similarly developed, will be recommended to the Saudi Ministry of Education for serious consideration and implementation.

Advantages

There are three advantages of developing a TASOL, as listed below.

- A. TASL/TASOL will be useful within the country to train expatriates to use Arabic in their work and daily life in the country.

B. As discussed in the Literature Review above, TASL/TASOL, with its internationally valid and reliable teaching/testing of Arabic to non-Arabic speakers, will help Saudi Arabia in the enhancement of educational and scientific reputation and undoubtedly put the country in higher positions.

C. The economic gains that will profit the country's financial diversity, since the country will own the rights of this programme and could sell the testing/ teaching rights to other countries or International institutions. TASL/TASOL implemented in Arabic-speaking countries will be useful to train potential expatriates to have sufficient skills in Arabic. Once it becomes popular, certificate on TASOL learned Arabic competency can be made mandatory for expatriates.

Factors to be considered for TASOL programmes

To develop an effective TASOL programme, it is necessary to learn some lessons from the negative aspects of TESOL reported by some researchers. In this process, one of the key concerns must be the recognition that the classical form of Arabic, which is typically used in religious contexts and in formal media such as news and oration, differs significantly from the colloquial/ local version of the language. Hence, an effective TASOL model will focus on a balanced approach to learning both versions of the language in accordance with the needs of various disparate learners.

The two works by Saudi educators may first be considered in order to understand the contexts in which an effective TASOL programme may be developed. In an analysis of TESOL in the Arabian Gulf region (EFL), Sayed (2003) identified lack of student motivation, low levels of literacy and achievements, traditional methods of learning and teaching and dependence on testing which would involve high stakes as the problems of EFL teaching. However, the most important issue had the structural constraints. One of them was the too rapid development in education sector transposing students suddenly from traditional classrooms to modern ones equipped with modern tools like laptops, mobile devices, and the internet. This change has happened even in a single generation. Other than English and Arabic, many languages are used by expatriates in the Gulf region. They find no relevance for English in daily life. Therefore, the students' use of English does not stretch beyond the classrooms. At school levels, English is generally taught by non-native teachers. At the higher education levels, expatriates constitute the majority of teachers. Linguistic and cultural distances between the teachers and students are wide and formulate an important factor. There is not much concrete evidence to indicate that countries other than Saudi Arabia have made specific efforts to train and equip local teachers. Here, the role of TESOL is evident. Differences between remuneration packages and working conditions across the different groups of expatriate teachers result in lack of motivation for innovative and effective teaching that takes into account the cultural frameworks within which the language is spoken. The need for their professional development is also obvious. The absence of systems and standards of quality and assessment is another problem. It is the duty of policy makers, administrators, professionals, and organizations like TESOL Arabia to work in a coordinated manner and rectify these problems at the earliest stages. The same problems are hypothesized to affect TASOL as well.

According to Al-Hazmi (2003), neither the programmes of Colleges of Education nor those of Colleges of Arts in Saudi Arabia can prepare the students for EFL teaching. They are either just

educators or English or English-Arabic translation specialists. The need for a more systematic effort to specifically prepare EFL teachers was stressed. Care needs to be taken that TASOL does not lead to this problem by ensuring coordination by all departments related to the Arabic language. Additionally, Eaton (2017) has discussed how TASOL can be developed as a source of revenue through separate procedures, fee structures and budgets. Eaton makes two critical points that must be considered while developing the TASOL model. First, training modules need to be established for the directors of such programmes to ensure the smooth facilitation of the project. Second, the fact that such a model must be economically viable cannot be ignored, but care must be taken to ensure that profit-making does not supersede the needs of learners and the requirement for a learning programme that adequately meets those needs.

There could be adaptation problems of different types. The inadequacies of Western-based TESOL programmes to train non-native English-speaking teacher trainees highlighted by Carrier (2003) is one issue. The transition from Saudi Arabic to global Arabic is desirable, but barriers are possible. Based on a review, Llurda (2004) reported that gradual acceptance of English as a global language had reduced the role of native English teachers in setting the norms and standards with some concomitant increase in the role of non-native teachers in adapting the lessons learned to their context. The report of Brown (1993) identified certain structural barriers on curriculum design and teaching strategies have led to a slow change to global English. Problems associated with the adoption of Western TESOL training in culturally dissimilar countries like Bangladesh for EFL and the need for adaptation were stressed by Chowdhury (2003). Neither Western style can be fitted into the traditional teacher-led teaching nor can the teaching system be abruptly changed to receive the Western TESOL system.

Local differences in TASOL within Saudi Arabia could occur. A TASOL programme that is offered by an institute in Jeddah, for instance, might be different from one that is offered in a village or a small town. Issues arising from such differences may be preempted by adopting a standardized method of teaching and learning, particularly in terms of the curriculums that are used by different institutes. The effect of local environments determined what was taught in two different MA-TESOL programmes at two different places (designated as West Coast University-WCU and South-Eastern University-SEU) in the USA and they varied. The implications of this divergence between two TESOL programmes in the same country was discussed by Ramanathan, Davies, and Schleppegrell (2001) using explanatory diagrams.

Greater theoretical bias in the programme can be harmful. In TASOL, an optimum balance between theory and practice needs to be maintained. A greater focus on theory than practice in US MATESOL programmes was reported by Govardhan, Nayar, and Sheorey (1999). Other defects like inadequacies in dealing with teaching methodologies also should not occur.

Ethnocentrism and racial and cultural problems of both teachers and students and inadequate stress on inter-cultural differences in applicability TESOL have been reported and discussed in US TESOL programmes by many researchers like Liu (1998), Kumaravadivelu (2003), Atkinson (1997), Nelson (1998) and Motha (2006).

Eventually, when other countries adapt TASOL, it is likely that wide variations between Saudi and non-Saudi TASOL will be found. The results of a survey in 2014 on Master of Arts programmes in TESOL (MATESOL) in 16 countries by Stapleton and Shao (2018) revealed that courses on teaching methods are the most common. Among the large variations, the US and non-US differences, especially on practicum components, were the widest. Social and cultural and inadequate focus on English in EFL contexts were also noted.

Despite the idealized images of US classrooms in literature, mainstream research on US classrooms revealed negative images similar to their Asian counterparts by Kubota (2001). Spero (2015) has also commented on the need to improve classroom spaces in the American context. As discussed above, the religious connotations of Arabic may be downplayed by developing learning programmes that focus specifically on the academic and/or professional contexts in which the language is commonly used.

Factors

Two important factors that need serious consideration are-

- A. Identification of the stakeholders: Who is going to enroll in these teaching/ testing programmes?

The stakeholders are-

- B. Learners- Learners are those who want to learn and teach Arabic at any level, either due to their personal or professional requirement or due to their interest in the language.

TASOL by definition is meant for those who do not speak Arabic as their native language but speak other foreign languages as their first language. Therefore, it excludes all individuals whose native language is Arabic, mostly those in the Gulf, Arab countries and certain other Muslim majority countries. That gives three types of learners, for whom TASOL could be useful. For simplicity of expression, those countries, where Arabic is the national and/or dominant language, are called Arab countries. Almost the entire/or a majority of the native population uses Arabic as their language in these countries.

A. Learners from other non-Arabic countries who stay in Saudi Arabia (or any other Arabic country, for that matter) for professional purposes. Some of them may return after a short period of stay, and they may not be interested in TASOL.

B. Learners from other countries, who visit Saudi Arabia or any other Arab country, frequently for business or other reasons. They may think that it is useful to study Arabic as they visit the Arab countries frequently and it would help in achieving the objective of their trips if they know the local language. They may use TASOL.

C. Muslims in other Muslim countries who speak other native languages and lack proficiency in Arabic, and that they consider Arabic as their cultural medium. Hence, they may use TASOL.

D. Non-Muslims in other countries (Muslim/non-Muslim) may use TASOL out of interest.

- TASOL Instructors- They train the learners who register for the TASOL programme.
- TASOL administrators- The TASOL programme and its sites need to be administered and managed well. Both management experts and technical experts will be part of the administration system.
- TASOL evaluators-In the absence of a better and more recognised assessment of learners to award certificates, diplomas and higher qualifications, ALPT of Arabic Academy will be used for assessment of the proficiency attained by the learners.
- Standards organizations- An independent organization, for example, TASOL Saudi Arabia, will be established and empowered to give recognition to TASOL offering institutions similar to the Canadian system (TESOLCanada, 2014).
- Saudi Ministry of Education, or a similar Saudi Educational body such as a University, will be responsible for the overall coordination of the TASOL activities.
- Saudi Ministry of Finance, through budgetary support, will provide the funds required for TASOL development. The ultimate aim is to make TASOL a self-financing organization.

B. If religion is not a motive, the TASOL programme can reach a wider audience including non-Muslims. Thereby, revenue can also be increased. Already, provision of two dimensions- one for Muslims and another for non-Muslims, are proposed so that TASOL benefits both Muslims and non-Muslims. As discussed above, the functional contexts of the language in business usage and professional workplace usage may be stressed for non-Muslim users.

The structure of the proposed TASOL

Based on the above discussions, TASOL will have the following structure-

- A. Direct/Online option
- B. Professional/Academic tracks
- C. Full time/Part time option
- D. Total duration of each course-

Working knowledge-1 month- 60 Hours including 4 hours practical

Certificate- 3 months- 150 Hours including 20 hours practicals

Diploma- 1 year-500 Hours including 150 hours practicals

Degree-3 years- 1500 Hours including 500 hours practical and project work

Master- 2 Years- 900 hours including 300 hours practical and project work and dissertation.

Doctorate- 3-5 Years- 600 hours or more, thesis as partial fulfillment.

For online courses, practicals can be done from a nearby Arabic school and a certificate of satisfactory completion of practicals shall be submitted.

Admission eligibility- Any adult with interest in Arabic who have cleared basic-level proficiency tests in Arabic can register for Working Knowledge and Certificate courses. Any adult with the previous qualifications in domains such as teaching and education from any institution recognized by TASOL can register for higher level courses.

No discrimination of any kind including gender.

The course content

Based on the content of courses in websites of TESOL institutions in USA and Canada, the following broad outline of course content is suggested for TASOL.

1. Arabic language history, culture, and development
2. Principles of Arabic language teaching and learning- linguistic, cognitive and affective aspects in traditional and modern classrooms
3. Factors which influence Arabic teaching/learning- principles of adult education, traditional and modern learning and teaching styles, psychology of learning and memorization, learning and teaching contexts and historical methodologies
4. Lesson planning of Arabic language courses- analysis of student needs, writing, selection and adaption of teaching materials, scaffolding learning and evaluation, language frameworks (CLB, CEFR)
5. Traditional and modern classrooms and teaching environment, suitability of different classroom environments for Arabic teaching, modern web tools and computerized and mobile devices, teaching/learning using web2.0 tools, encouraging out of class learning
6. Teaching the four skills of Arabic (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), grammar & structure, pronunciation, vocabulary
7. Testing and assessment of learner performance during the course
8. Classroom management
9. Importance of culture and socio-economic characteristics in learning and teaching style preferences
10. Personal approaches to professional development

The course content will be almost similar for all levels of courses. The relative importance and depth of dealing with different topics may differ with the level of the course; for example, a basic-level course may not go into the intricacies of language use.

Method of implementation of TASOL

It may not be sensible to expect numerous registrations for TASOL courses from all parts of the world as soon as it is introduced. Also, introducing all components of the course at great expense may not yield immediate returns. Hence, it will be prudent to introduce each level of this programme after a study of demands slowly and gradually. Wide publicity needs to be given for TASOL across the world. Only the promotion and marketing of TASOL as a product will lead to success.

At the same time, research works for evaluation of TASOL need to be done and the progress needs to be periodically assessed to make corrections if required at any stage. Independent research by scientists from other parts of the world will also happen. Criticisms against TASOL need to be addressed through suitable corrective steps or defense of current practices as each case may require different measures.

The case of TESOL as a brand sold and marketed TASOL can become a good source of income by helping other countries to adopt or adapt it by providing consultancies, selling rights or opening branches, depending upon the policies of the host country and economics involved.

Conclusions

Similar to TESOL being practiced in the USA and Canada, a TASOL for the Arabic language has been proposed. Attempts have been made to avoid the defects of TESOL and make it more universal rather than culturally restricting it to Muslims of the world. The courses of TASOL will be highly useful for any individual, agency or country, interested in the Arabic language.

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