Designing curriculum for teaching Arabic language for the purpose of understanding the Qur'an

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Abstract

This paper reports on a curriculum recently designed for teaching Arabic language for the purpose of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an in one of the universities in Brunei Darussalam. The target audience comprises of adult learners of Arabic language who have either registered for, or shown interest in learning Arabic language for the purpose of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an. The thrust of this report lies in sharing an innovative way of designing various components of a curriculum and the likely method of teaching and evaluation for learners of Arabic language in Brunei Darussalam.

General background of the study

Teaching of second language for a specific purpose rather than for general purpose began in the seventies (Benesch, 2001; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991). In Brunei Darussalam, in November 2012, a program was floated in one of its

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universities, for teaching Arabic language for the purpose of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an. In the beginning, there was a very large turnout among the public, and students were registered in hundreds. Unfortunately, year-in year-out, the number began to decrease drastically, and by the beginning of year 2016 when the program was opened for another intake, the applicants in all the available levels were approximately 35 people. A pilot study shows that the program was established without prior investigation into the learners' needs, and that many previous learners who have attended the program were unable to actualize their expectations from the program.

The purpose of this paper is to report the major findings which were discovered with respect to learning Arabic language for the purpose of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an. We used grounded theory methodology[3] (Holton, 2008) and Kano model Questionnaire (see for detail: Kano, et al, 1984; Sauerwein & Hinterhuber, 1996; Shen, & Xie, 2000) for revealing the need of the learners. A detail account of research methodology, method and general research design foes beyond the scope of this paper. The learners' general objectives, and preferred content and methods of teaching and evaluation are detailed in the following sections.

General objective

Under the general objective, learners expressed their views that they attended Arabic language program mainly because of their expectation that they would be able to understand the meaning of the Qur'an. They expect the program to make them closer to the Qur'an when listening

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[3] Although grounded theory methodology is well celebrated by the proponents of qualitative paradigm, the authors align perfectly with views that it is rather a methodology, not a method, which accommodates the use of both inductive and deductive approaches or mixing of both. Glaser, the pioneering founder of grounded theory methodology, and Holton, a Glaser co-author made this distinction clear in some of their works (e.g: Glaser & Holton 2007; Holton, 2008). This research is a demonstration of how grounded theory methodology could be used to integrate both inductive and deductive approaches. For detail distinction between Methodology and method see: Kelly (2004).

to it in five daily prayers and when they read its verses. More importantly, they wish to be well acquainted with the Qur'an language style and understand some Arabic words as they are used in the Qur'an context. Other purposes that are also germane to knowledge of the Qur'an include development of Qur'an vocabulary, understanding some simple rules of intonation (*Tajwid*) so as to enhance proper reading of the Qur'an and to develop phonetic skills in the reading of Qur'an.

On the whole, ability to understand the Qur'an was their primary purpose. Other expectations include ability to speak Arabic language in simple conversations, especially when they go to Arab restaurants in the country or when they travel to Arabia. They also express the need to be able to read simple Arabic language passages and comprehend the meaning correctly.

The Content

Content in a curriculum can be automatically determined once the general objectives have been discovered. However, the learners also mentioned some topics and skills which they expected to be included in the curriculum. The topics can be classified into two categories: the first category comprises of topics and skills that are related to Qur'anic knowledge while the second category comprises of topics and skills that are related to general Arabic language learning. In the category of Qur'anic knowledge, they mentioned topics such understanding the meaning of the short Qur'an *surahs* (chapters) especially form Surah Adh-Duha to Surah An-Nas. They also showed interest in studying the stories of Qur'an especially the stories of prophet Yusuf, *Ashabul Khaf* (the people of the cave), and *Ashabul feel* (the people of the elephant). They also expect to learn some Qur'anic themes such as greatness of Allah, His majestic power, His oneness and the judgment day. They expected to study Qur'anic verses in a thematic way whereby verses of Quran related to each of these topics are studied under each theme.

In the category of general Arabic language learning skills they expressed their need for learning Arabic grammatical rules which would enable them decode Qur'anic verses. Even though this need is tied to Qur'anic language learning they see it as a perquisite that would enable them understand Arabic passages, construct short sentences on their own and understand why sentences containing same number of words are interpreted differently.

The preferred method of teaching

Learners expressed their preference with respect to the roles of teacher and learner in the teaching-learning process. As against the popular problem based learning method, they all prefer traditional method of teaching where teacher would assume the primary role of knowledge dissemination. They referred to this as *talqqy* approach (direct intake from teacher). When asked about this preference, they viewed *talaqqy* method as a blessed way to learn the meaning of the Qur'an which and safeguard against being misguided about Islam.

They also expressed their interest in the use of technological tools as audio-visual aids which should only take a secondary role. They all regarded online learning a last resort which they would only choose when direct interaction with teacher is not possible.

They also expressed the need for learners to interact with each other in the classroom for the purpose of enhancing their communicative skills. In other words, they prefer cooperative learning method.

As against the popular call for direct method in second language teaching, learners express the need for the use of a supportive language when extremely needed. They believe gesticulations and pictures as proposed by monolingual approach would waste more of their especially when explaining abstract meanings contained in Qur'an. While acknowledging that the use of mother tongue or first language could ease the process of language understanding they

frowned at excessive use of mother tongue or first language by the teacher. They also showed their preference for slowly communicated language which they believe should continue until they reach the advance stage where their proficiency would have developed well.

Since the majority of the target learners are Malay language speakers they also expressed the need to instrument the loan words that are contained in the Malay language to enhance their understanding of Arabic language. They see this method as a way that would reduce phobia for Arabic language and motivate them to learn more.

Furthermore, learners prefer individualized progress whereby each learner progresses according to his or her cognitive ability and time availability. This calls for adoption of an individualized instruction method. This would also necessitate that the curriculum and consequently the textbook that would be designed should be a unit based.

Method of Evaluation

With regards to method of evaluation, the learners prefer a formative evaluation rather than summative one. In formative evaluation, learner would be evaluated after each unit and by class works not by terminal exams. The achieved score in each unit would later be accumulated to determine learner's progress. They expressed their phobia for memorization and that it scares and discourages them to continue the programs.

Learners also frowned at excessive home works and take home assignments. They see it as disturbing due to their busy work schedule and the need to attend to many other important things during their out of work time. They prefer doing all the assignments right inside the classroom and under the guidance of the teacher and colleagues.

As mentioned earlier, learners prefer individualized progress whereby each learner progresses according to his or her cognitive

ability and time availability. Consequently, evaluation would be criterion based and as well formative.

While suggesting some of their preferred techniques of evaluation, the learners cherished classroom quizzes. They also mentioned outdoor language exhibition whereby learners would go to an Arabic speaking environment such as markets and restaurants and demonstrate their level of language proficiency. Such outdoor trips would be audio taped or video recorded and then played in the classroom for analysis and then scored accordingly.

Conclusion

This study reveals the learners' needs with respect to learning Arabic language for the purpose of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an. Although the result reported here is just a section of a whole study it provides some deep insights into the needs of Malay language learners of Arabic language, especially in Brunei Darussalam.

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