

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO THE TEACHING OF ARABIC LANGUAGE: ARE NIGERIAN TEACHERS OF THE LANGUAGE READY

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Abstract

As a result of the developments in this technological era, the use of Information Technology has experienced drastic development in the educational enterprise as it has become an integral part of the instructional process in many schools. This study used a qualitative method to investigate Arabic language teachers' awareness and readiness to integrate technology in teaching Arabic. Fifty six (56) Arabic language teachers participated in the study. Data was collected through the structured interview schedule. The major theme and questions of the interview were a) Arabic teachers' awareness of technology; b) their use of technology for teaching; c) types of technology in use; d) major obstacles and challenges to use technology. Findings majorly showed that participants were aware of the need to use technology to teach Arabic. They however complained about lack of resources, scarcity of technology available to teach Arabic and paucity of proper training to use technology. The paper concludes on the recommendations to develop an educational framework that helps in learning Arabic by integrating the traditional curricula with educational events using modern technological devices and gadgets in attractive and interactive manner.

Keywords: Arabic, Technology, Readiness, Awareness, Integrate and Teachers.

Introduction

Technology has changed the way things are carried out in every sphere of life. It has become indispensable in all fields of life. In the classroom, Saglan & Sert (2012) opined that is not only useful for learners but equally for teachers. It has become an integral part of a successful lesson delivery. Researchers across the globe and various fields have demonstrated great interest in investigating instructional technology in terms of availability, utilisation and obstacles in its usage in the classroom. This is why many educational leaders and policy makers concluded that computers and related modern technologies represent important educational innovations and hence, an indispensable tool in the hands of educators.

Teaching and learning a foreign language through technology has become a new trend in Foreign Language Education all over the world (Liu, 2009). As Verkler (2004) posited, technology can greatly enrich the communicative based approach that is expected to be prevalent in Foreign Language practices. However, these researchers believe that most FL teachers in Nigeria, know very little about the effective use of technology in education and even fewer integrate it into their classroom instruction. Realistically speaking, Arabic teachers in Nigeria do not seem to be ready yet for teaching in the 21st century. From personal interactions, observations and visitations to schools during Teaching Practice and workshops with Arabic teachers who have yet to integrate technology into the teaching process.

Gilakjani (2012) identified factors affecting teachers' use of technology and concluded that teachers should be introduced to the types of computer technology and to aim at the usefulness and benefits of these resources in improving teaching and learning. In the same vein, Saglani, Al-Qarni&Ghal (2013) examined 12 in-service English language teachers readiness to integrate technology in the Ascer region of Saudi Arabia and found that although participants were willing to use technology, they complained of lack of funding, scarcity of technology in schools and paucity of proper training to use technology in teaching English Language as a Foreign Language.

Sheikh (2013) explored various advantages of ICT in language learning and found that it allowed wide spread classroom that provides qualitative, qualitative and economic advantages. He posited that the individual

language teaching is one-way process which, follows a well-defined, time frame and which models the contents on the basis of the user's results. Hamed (2012) also studied how teachers of Arabic language use technology in secondary school in Riyadh. This study revealed that many electronic instructional technology tools were available and that electronic instructional technology activities in teaching Arabic in Riyadh Secondary Schools were high. Sylam & Sert (2012) in their own study, discovered that despite the lack of proper training, English language teachers were willing to use technology for teaching.

Badri-Ali (2019) highlighted different ways by which technology can be used to teach Arabic as:

- To help to develop the techniques of assimilation, word processing and reading speed;
- To encourage writing through the use of word processing programs which will give learners freedom to address such instant corrections, spelling checks and transactions;
- To teach listening through the identification of specific audio signals and ends with the absorption of what was heard, like audio and video system.

He further reiterated the benefits of using modern technology in the educational process as;

- Providing educational materials in a suitable degree to the abilities of students.
- Providing opportunities to interact with the learners such as through dialogue.
- Creating an active and interactive learning environment between the machine and the human.
- Providing elements of excitement and suspense in the language classroom.

Recent studies have shown that the success or failure of the use of technology for education will depend largely on the attitudes of teachers, who eventually determine how they are used in the classroom. Teachers' perceptions about integrating technology in teaching has not received much research attention in Nigeria. Moreso, its use in the teaching of Arabic, an elective course in schools. According to Surajudeen and Adebisi (2012), the history of Arabic in Nigeria is not quite different from that of other non-Arab Muslim societies. Arab traders who extended their trading interests to West Africa also carried along with them their religion and language. On their arrival to West Africa, they embarked on a process of conversion of the African population, an effort which involved adapting not only to the religious precepts of Islam, but also to Arabic with the imperfections associated with the acquisition of a Foreign Language within the context of a dominant Mother Tongue. Thus, the process of propagation and Arabic Education occurred simultaneously. The process of the acquisition of Arabic was initially informal and at best non-formal since the early agents of Arabic Education were mainly merchants. As early as the 11th Century, the introduction of Islam in Kanem Borno signalled the beginning of Quranic and Arabic education in the area. This confirms the reality of the foreign status of Arabic in Nigeria. Muslims who required basic literacy in Arabic for the purpose of performing Islamic rituals are contented with the mastery of the rules of reading and writing the Arabic script. At this rudimentary level of Arabic studies, majority of the pupils who learn Arabic do so through the non-formal Quranic schools called 'makarantor Allo' or Tablet school in Northern Nigeria and 'Ilekewu' or 'Home of Arabic in Western Nigeria. One of the main purposes of teaching Arabic at the secondary level is to meet both foundational and transitional objectives particularly for those who may pursue a career in Arabic through its extensive study in higher education.

The two objectives are hardly achieved since most of the students who secure admission into tertiary institutions to study Arabic are the products of the *madaris* many of whom encounter difficulties in communicating in English. This situation has inexorably provided a recipe for deficiencies in the teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language at the tertiary level (Surajudeen and Adebisi, 2012). The Arabic Language occupies a position of great importance in the life of native and non-native speakers who seek to learn it as a result of its connection and relationship to the Holy Qur'an and its being the median of their 5-times daily worship. With the world being a global market, non-Muslims at a point or the other have also sought to learn Arabic to achieve some level of social, economic and political purposes. Thus, in Nigeria, people exact considerable efforts to disseminate the knowledge of the language by establishing schools, institutions and specialized departments for the study of Arabic language.

Therefore, there is and there will always be an increasing need to learn and understand the Arabic language, its culture and related sciences. However, as asserted by Badri-Ali (2019), the research and infrastructure available to help facilitate learning and teaching the language are not keeping pace with these growing needs. Invariably

therefore, there is a wide gap. Arabic is not typically used as a language of communication in Nigeria or in any spheres of life. Religion and specifically, the Islamic faith provides the major context in which Arabic is immensely powerfully used. This, as it is the language of Islamic devotion, used by several millions of Nigerians who are Muslims. It is no surprises then, when it is only regarded (albeit-erroneously) as a twin of Islamic studies and hence learnt by only Muslims. The Arabic language is learnt in two different contexts: the private- Muslim owned and administered institutions, and the public owned and runned academies of learning. At the Lagos State University, Arabic is studied as a major at both the Faculties of Art and Education as a requirement for students of History and International Relations, English language major, French, Philosophy and Islamic Studies major. It is a mixed group of Muslims, Christians (and perhaps other faiths). They are taken through 2 full semesters of instruction in basic conversational Arabic course.

Methodology

According to Cropley (2019), Qualitative research method, examines the way people make sense out of their own concrete life experiences in their own minds and in their own words. This allows information to be expressed in everyday language using everyday concepts. The qualitative method is appropriate to a small-scale educative research (Hamilton 2018). For this reasons, the researchers relied on qualitative research approach for in depth understanding of Arabic language teacher’s knowledge, perceptions and views. Lagos State University was chosen to carry out this research study.

The researchers choose 56 all male Arabic language teachers. These groups were purposefully sampled because female students were not among the group of teachers studied. Out of (65) contacted, only (56) responded and made themselves available for the study. In all, a total of (56) teachers were interviewed. All of them had prior qualifications in Arabic language from recognized Arabic Schools in Nigeria and were notably registered students of the sampled university. They all teach Arabic at different levels of primary and secondary education. 5 of the participants operate their own Arabic schools. Except for one participant, all other 55 had all spent between an average of 6 – 10 years in specialised Arabic schools and have been awarded the ‘Ibtidaa’ certificate on completion.

One of the researchers contacted all the participants and took from them informed consent. They were all briefed on the purpose of the research and the confidentiality of their responses was assured. The participants were all very enthusiastic to express their views. A day was scheduled to fall on the convenience of all participants and all unanimously agreed. However, at the scheduled time of the interview, the Lagos State University was not allowing students into the campus due to an industrial action by the Union members. The researchers were therefore constrained to conduct the interview via a direct phone voice connection and whatsapp messaging. In all, 24 participants were interviewed via whatsapp while 42 were through voice calls. The interviews were conducted between February 15th and 22nd 2021. All the interview were recorded and saved.

Results

What are Arabic teachers' understanding and perceptions of Technology to teach Arabic?

One of the major interest of this study was to know the participants' understanding of technology. This was made clear in their responses that most were acquainted with modern technology in relation to teaching. As one participant explained,

“Technology in Arabic classroom is the application of any-form of technology in making Arabic easily taught and learned.”

Similarly, another said,

“It is a system whereby teachers in schools use technology, like TV monitors and computers to improve learning skills”

Yet another response.,

“It is the process of teaching Arabic language through a modern means.”

Are Arabic Teachers using Technology in Arabic Classroom?

The researchers were keen to know Arabic teachers’ use of technology in the classroom. Their responses to this question showed an abysmal disparity between participants' knowledge of technology and their practical use in Arabic language classroom. Only 13% of them agreed that they have through one device and media or the other

ever used technology to teach Arabic.

One participant said,

"I have never taught Arabic language with more than textbooks, chalk and board."

Another clearly responded,

"We don't use any form of technology to teach Arabic in my school."

What type of technology is used in teaching Arabic?

Another important question and aspect of the research was the type of technology teachers of Arabic were conversant with. During the interview, findings revealed that most teachers perception of technology is majorly limited to the use of computer (89%); phones (60%); audio sets of MP₃ (53%). The next commonly named are TV monitors (50%), very few mentioned overhead projectors (32%); ipads (31%) and there was no mention or knowledge of interactive whiteboards as technological tools that could be used to teach Arabic.

What challenges were faced in the use of technology?

The participants responded that they were challenged by acute scarcity of technological gadgets and resources in schools. They also lamented the paucity of funds and lack of adequate power provision to power those available. Other noted challenges are; lack of motivation from the school authorities; lack of adequate knowledge to use technology, low socio-economic status of the students being taught and internet connectivity issues.

One participant responded thus:

"I know what technology is. But my problem is that we do not have technology in the school where I teach. I bring my laptop to school if I need to use it to teach."

All the participants emphasized the need for training to use modern technology in the Arabic language classroom. One of the participants said,

"We need computers, internet connections and proper training to use technology for language teaching".

Discussion

The above results implied that the majority of the sampled teachers seemed to have a good awareness and knowledge of technology, though not commonly used to teach Arabic. They also commonly agreed that there was need for Arabic Education in Nigeria, to upgrade instruction to be active to modern development in order to motivate learners. It is a positive thing that the sampled Arabic teachers in Nigeria have adequate knowledge of modern technology. They should not only have knowledge of digital technology but also how to use it.

It is also note-worthy that they are optimistic to use it in the future as well which supports Ewa (2005)'s point of view that teachers were willing to use technology in the future. Most of the teachers find it useful for students which validates Saglam and Sert (2012)'s statement that technology is beneficial for both. The scarcity of technology is a main issue which shows that schools generally do not have instructional technology needed.

Finally, teachers need proper training to use technology. As Khan (2011) recommended, there is need for urgent and regular pre-service and in-service teacher training for Arabic language teachers in Nigeria. From above finding, it is crystal clear that Arabic language teachers in Nigerian schools are willing to integrate technology into their classes but they need technology and proper training to use it.

Conclusion

This research concludes that it would not be good to continue teaching Arabic in the old ways and means. Times have changed and Arabic language Education must change with it. Open electronic/technology sources have to be designed to contain materials that would enefit the learners and improve Arabic language and make it easy for the learners As recommended by Jouejati (2011), Arabic teachers should be ready to take students to a higher level of learning by applying best practices and, consequently, making the digital experience a personal one through constructing meaningful, concrete and lasting experiences in learning Arabic. Students should be able to use social media applications that make sense to them. They need to see what matters to them in a digital form, which is also their way to move on to a higher level of achievement. We believe that when modern technology is successfully integrated into the teaching and learning of Arabic at all levels, learners will benefit and it would help to improve and motive them. It will also solve the challenges of distance or proximity and logistics to non-native learners. Our study cannot be generalized to other part of Nigeria. It is limited to teachers

undertaking degree course at the Lagos State University, Ojo.Lagos. We also do not know about female Arabic teachers' concerns and perceptions regarding the variables under study as there is no single female student in the sampled group.

Recommendations

We advise their inclusion in subsequent related studies. This study recommends the following:

1. Provision of modern technology in all schools for general teaching and specifically for the teaching of Arabic language;
2. Provision of proper training to in-service teachers to use technology for language teaching.
3. Teachers must be prepared with the ability to find and adapt new technologies to engage Generation or Generation students.

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