

Malaysian Students Learning The Arabic Language In Arab Schools In Malaysia: A Future Study

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the future of teaching Arabic Language in Arab schools in Malaysia. The method used here is called Fuzzy Delphi, and the data were collected from a group of experts containing teachers, parents and school principals in order to predict the situation of these schools in the next 10 years, and to overcome the challenges of teaching Arabic language with innovative activities and a modern curriculum. The issue here discusses the role that should be played by both Arab schools and authorities in order to fulfil parents' expectations. The results obtained out of this study indicates that more modern and computer based learning materials must be provided by Arab schools to enhance the learning of Arabic language. In addition, students must be enough motivated to learn Arabic.

Keywords: Arabic, Languages, Teaching, Learning, Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language is under big concern by Malaysian people, it has been noted a lot of Malaysian families are sending their children to learn Arabic language and that is because Arabic is related with their own culture as well as their religion which most Malaysians follow (Teh, Embi, Yusoff, & Mahamod, 2009). Hence, Arabic has been started teaching in several places such as schools, institutes, Islamic classes, and universities (Zubairi & Sarudin, 2009). In addition to that it has been observed recently there are many Arabic international schools are opened around Malaysia especially in Kuala Lumpur and surrounding areas where Arabic is being taught in these schools beside the other subjects such as Maths and Science. The idea of Arabic schools obtained a big acceptance in the Malaysian society at the beginning and accordingly the number of Malay students getting in to Arabic schools started increasing. There are more than 5 Arabic international schools in Malaysia. However, only three schools are having Malay students in their class rooms. These schools are the International Modern Arabic School (IMAS) with almost 100 Malay students, next is the Saudi School with 40 Malay students, and finally comes Al Baseerah School with around 30 students. In IMAS they offer an Arabic curriculum enriched with international curricula and delivered by English and Arabic. However, a complete idea about the teaching program could not be found on their websites, which forced the researchers to visit these schools. The teaching quality of Arabic language became a big question mark. Where the students spend most of their time with several subjects without concentrating on neither Arabic nor other subjects, hence leading to switching from one subject to other without a perfect knowledge on either. In fact, there are several teachers and school principals declared that the number of Malay students in Arabic schools started decreasing, and some of them transferred to other local schools leading to fluctuation (between increase and decrease) in the number of students per year registering and leaving the Arabic schools. There is no study so far done on this topic which explains the reasons in details behind registering and leaving the Malaysian students the Arabic schools. Hence, this study aims at investigating the future of Arabic language in Arab schools in Malaysia and this goal will be investigated through the following objectives:

- To identify the reasons that make Malaysian families send their children to Arab schools.
- To identify the role that should be played by Arab schools to attract Malaysian students.
- To identify the characteristics of the ideal curriculum for teaching Arabic language.
- To investigate the role that should be played by the authorities to improve the educational process of Arab schools.

Three research questions were formulated for the purpose of study as follows:

1. What are the factors that motivate the parents to send their children to Arab schools?
2. What is the role that should be played by the Arab schools in order to establish an effective Arabic program?
3. What are the characteristics of the ideal curriculum that should be used to teach Arabic language?
4. What is the role of the authorities that should be played to improve the educational process?

Literature Review

Several studies have been done to motivate Malaysian students to learn foreign languages. A recent study done by ([Zubairi & Sarudin, 2009](#)) which investigates the Malaysian students motivation to learn a foreign language. This study concluded that Malaysian students learn a foreign language for extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. Compulsory foreign language requirement in the school's curriculum may enhance intrinsic motivation. This study also concluded that the content of the courses and the methods of classroom teaching can then be planned based on the different needs and motivation of the learners. Another study done by ([Mustapha, Mustapha, Daud, & Wahab, 2013](#)) which focuses on self-efficiency in Arabic language learning. This study concludes that measuring students' efficacy on specific language task will enhance the instrument and see its specific impact on students' achievement. This instrument would then have a direct practical impact on the teaching and learning processes. When Arabic learners believe that they are good readers, writers and able to use correct grammar in their communication, the effect of these beliefs is observed in the improvement of their performance. Finally an old study has been done by ([Ismail, 1993](#)) on teaching the Arabic language in the National University of Malaysia. This study has concerned with the teaching and learning of Arabic as a second or a foreign language in Malaysia in general and in the Faculty of Islamic Studies of the National University of Malaysia in particular. The main purpose of this study was evaluating the existing Arabic language program in the Faculty, and to provide some suggestions for its improvement.

Methodology

In this section we will describe first the algorithms used in the questionnaire for the purpose of the data collection and analysis.

3.1 DELPHI TECHNIQUE

Delphi technique has been chosen to perform the data collection and analysis. This technique is about gathering information from highly qualified experts to develop the predictions about future events. A panel of experts is chosen and their opinion is released for each feature where the responses of experts are collected and analyzed statistically. This method is broadly used by researchers in the various fields of Science, Technology and Management ([Cheng & Lin, 2002](#); [Kaufmann & Gupta, 1988](#); [Murray, Pipino, & van Gigch, 1985](#)). There are several methods of Delphi Technique; The Basic FDM has been used in this study. The steps for Basic FDM are as follows:

1. Selection of experts
2. Collection of opinions of decision group: Finding the evaluation score of each alternate factor's significance given by each expert by using linguistic variables in questionnaires.
3. Setting up triangular fuzzy numbers: Calculating the evaluation value of triangular fuzzy number of each alternate factor given by experts, finding out the significance triangular fuzzy number of the alternate factor.
4. Calculating threshold value, d to determine consensus of experts' opinion.
5. Defuzzification: Using simple centre of gravity method to defuzzify the fuzzy weight.
6. Ranking of items (alpha-cut)

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Selection of experts can be done in two ways:

- Determine the experts.
- Numbers of experts:
 - i. 10-15 respondents ([Adler & Ziglio, 1996](#))
 - ii. 10-50 respondents ([Jones & Twiss, 1978](#))

In our approach we have used the first option which is determine experts.15 experts have been selected to answer the questions. These experts are schools principals, Arabic language teachers and parents.

3.3 SETTINGS

These experts were gathered two times. In the first time an open question about the future of Arabic language in Arab schools in Malaysia was given. During the discussion the facilitator noted their different opinions and wrote them down to create the questionnaire.

3.4 PILOT TEST

After the questionnaire was set the facilitator passed the questionnaire to the experts for amendments. The experts joined some items and changed some items in the questionnaire. In the final step the final questionnaire was created with consideration of experts' amendments.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Fuzzy Delphi method calculating the evaluation value of triangular fuzzy number of each alternate factor given by experts is done as shown in Table 1. Where r1, r2 ... are the experts participated and 1.1, 1.2 are the number of questions. The values inside the table are rated as follows:-

Strongly Agree	0.60 0.80 1
Agree	0.40 0.60 0.80
Neutral	0.20 0.40 0.60
Disagree	0.10 0.20 0.40
Strongly Disagree	0.00 0.10 0.20

Experts	1.1			1.2		
	r1	0.6	0.8	1	0.4	0.6
r2	0.6	0.8	1	0.4	0.6	0.8
r3	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.8
r4	0.6	0.8	1	0.6	0.8	1
r5	0.6	0.8	1	0.6	0.8	1
r6	0.6	0.8	1	0.6	0.8	1
r7	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.8
r8	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.6
r9	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8	1
r10	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.6
r11	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.8
r12	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.8
r13	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.8
r14	0.6	0.8	1	0.4	0.6	0.8
r15	0.6	0.8	1	0.6	0.8	1
Average	0.467	0.667	0.867	0.44	0.64	0.84
Fuzzy evaluation	7	10	13	6.6	9.6	13
Defuzzification	10			9.6		

Figure 1: Alternative

The above Figure 1 shows the average that is M1, M2 and M3 which is the fuzzy evaluation divided by 15 (number of experts) step 3 in the basic FDM. It shows also the fuzzy evaluation this is the total of the columns and finally Defuzzification which is total of fuzzy evaluation divided by 3.

Next we have calculated the threshold value using the formula below as observed in the following Figure 2.

$$d(\tilde{m}, \tilde{n}) = \sqrt{\frac{1}{3}[(m_1 - n_1)^2 + (m_2 - n_2)^2 + (m_3 - n_3)^2]}$$

Expert	1.1	1.2	1.3
1	0.02074064	0.00186667	0.0168
2	0.02074064	0.00186667	0.0168
3	0.08296317	0.00186667	0.00746667
4	0.02074064	0.02986667	0.00746667
5	0.02074064	0.02986667	0.00746667
6	0.02074064	0.02986667	0.00746667
7	0.00518524	0.00186667	0.0168
8	0.00518524	0.0672	0.00746667
9	0.00518524	0.02986667	0.0168
10	0.00518524	0.0672	0.0168
11	0.08296317	0.00186667	0.00746667
12	0.00518524	0.00186667	0.00746667
13	0.00518524	0.00186667	0.00746667
14	0.02074064	0.00186667	0.0168
15	0.02074064	0.02986667	0.00746667
Average	0.34222222	0.29866667	0.168

Figure 2: Threshold Value

According to (Chen & Lin, 2002) percentage of consensus should be more than 75%, otherwise subsequent

rounds of questionnaire needed and each item needs to be less than or equal to 0.2. In our case the percentage of consensus is 100% which is considered to be a good result of consensus and all items of the questionnaire were less than 0.2. In the ranking of items is following Figure 3 ranking process.

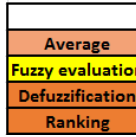


Figure 3:

The ranking (con't) the importance experts opinions. in Table 1.

Table 1:

Ranking	Item Number	The item
1	1.4	Students should have intrinsic motivation to learn the Arabic Language.
1	2.2	Schools should establish an Arabic proficiency test.
2	2.4	Schools must have language labs.
3	1.6	Students who speak Arabic have a better understanding for Quran and Islam in general
3	2.5	Schools need to focus on extrinsic motivation (trips, awards, debates) in order to encourage students to learn Arabic Language.
3	3.3	Arabic language textbooks should be supported with up to date teaching methods such as CDs & Internet.
3	4.1	Authorities Should provide facilities for opening new Arabic schools.
4	4.2	Authorities Should offer scholarships for excellent students to Arab countries.
4	4.3	Authorities should establish a committee to supervise the performance of Malaysian

final step the done. The describes the

Ranking

sorts the items by according to They are as shown

Ranking

		students in Arab schools.
5	1.3	Students should be engaged with authentic materials.
6	2.6	A website should be designed to help students to interact with native speakers. (forums, chat rooms)
7	2.3	The teacher of Arabic Language should be a native speaker.
7	3.1	Arabic Language textbooks must focus on teaching the language skills rather than teaching the religion.
7	3.5	The curriculum should discuss fundamental social issues especially those concerned with the issues of youth.
8	1.1	Students should study a preparatory year in Arabic language.

As observed from the table above ranking of some items are positioning in the same level. For example item number 1.4 and 2.2 ranked in the first position. And 1.6, 2.5, 3.3 and 4.1 are ranked in the third position. This is because according to the questionnaire some experts had a common opinion about answering certain questions.

DISCUSSION

4.1 FINDINGS

This study investigated the situation of Malaysian students learning the Arabic language in Arab schools. It has been conducted by 15 participants from IMAS, Saudi school, Baseerah school, and some parents. Some interesting findings emerged from this study. Learning Arabic language relies on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the students, which necessitates parents and schools to increase the motivation of students to learn Arabic.

The Findings of the study in relation to objectives as summarized as following:-

a) To identify the reasons that make Malaysian families send their children to Arab schools.

Parents are highly motivated to send their kids to Arab schools to learn Arabic in order to have better understanding for the holy Quran and Islam. In their opinion Arab schools are the best place for their kids to practice Arabic language due to availability of Arabic native speakers (teachers & students) in these schools.

b) To identify the role that should be played by Arab schools to attract Malaysian students.

Since there is no proficiency test to measure the level of the student like TOEFL and ILETS, Arabic schools need to prepare such proficiency tests for the non-native speakers.

It has been also noticed that the Arab schools must improve their current facilities such as setting up computer labs, using different computer based learning materials and developing a better curriculum supported by up to date methods. Effective Language activities such as debates, competitions and field visits need to be considered.

c) To investigate the role that should be played by the authorities to improve the educational process of Arab

schools.

Depending on the motivation of the parents to send their kids to Arab schools, more encouragement is expected from the authorities such as facilitating for opening new Arabic schools in different parts of the country to shorten the distance, providing awards and scholarships for excellent students to complete their higher education abroad in Arab countries, and close supervision of Arab schools' performance.

5.2 LIMITATION

This study has been done with consideration of two selected schools only that is The International Modern Arabic School and the Saudi School in Kuala Lumpur.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Arab schools management needs to give special considerations to Arabic departments because it is the core of their schools. This can be achieved by offering/providing awards to distinguished students, creating activities, improving curricula, and enhancing the computer labs.

The Arabic syllabus must be enhanced with self-learning materials such as CDs, games and online materials.

Arabic language students should be engaged with activities and events that organized by embassies of Arabic countries.

An Arabic proficiency test must be created (such as TOEFL and ILETS in English language). This may be done by international organizations.

5.5 FUTURE WORK

As observed from Table 1: the ranking shows that four aspects have been taken under high consideration by the experts:

1. Student's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
2. Multimedia and language teaching tools.
3. International proficiency test
4. Understanding the holy Quran and religion.

The researcher will conduct an ISM (interpretive structural modeling) study to investigate the relation between the four factors above.

Conclusion

In the final conclusion of this study, it has been observed that for learning Arabic language self motivation of the student plays the most important factor. The motivation can be enhanced by first parents at home and then teachers in the school. Students must be categorized in proper groups where a curriculum must be set for each group of students. This can be achieved by setting a placement test for the students at the admission time in the school. It has been observed from this study that the Arab schools in Malaysia are in lack of professional language learning computer labs and computer based learning materials. This facility should be provided in order to enhance the capability of learning Arabic language. It has been also observed from this study that the Arab schools in Malaysia are very few, and they are available in certain areas only. For more convince the higher authority should encourage the Arab business men to open more schools in different areas of the country. Proper facilities must be provided by the high authorities such as lands where these schools can be built and scholarships for distinguished students.

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