The Usage of Direct Method in Learning Arabic at Home

Norfaezah Mohd Hamidin

ABSTRACT

Arabic language is amongst one of the most important languages in the world. Its importance is accentuated in the business world as Arab countries are known for their economic prowess and ingenuity. In the Muslim world, learning Arabic becomes farḍʿ ʿayn or compulsory because it is the crux of the Islamic religion which uses the Quran as its main reference for guidance. Learning Arabic strengthens the understanding of the Quran and Hadith. Children in Malaysia are now learning Arabic in schools but the teaching and learning of Arabic is limited in the classroom and hardly used outside school. Consequently, the learning of the Arabic language is not so successful in Malaysia because this language is taught using Bahasa Melayu as a medium. Hence, drastic steps must be taken by parents to encourage the use of the language outside the classroom using the direct method. Syllabus should be revised to include the use of Arabic language at home via home schooling. Hopefully, this step will propel the successful learning of Arabic language as a second language in Malaysia.

Keywords: learning Arabic as a second language, direct method, communication language

Introduction

Education is one of the most important aspects in human development and perhaps the most influential social institution in any society. In general, education is to transmit a common set of beliefs, values, norms, and understanding from the adult to its youths. Islam looks at education as a form of worship: ibadah where Muslims share a common set of values based on the Quran (the fundamental and most reliable source for many fields of knowledge) and Hadith. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-ʿAṭās (1980) defines education from his perspective, as “something progressively instilled into man” (p.13). He formulated that the education constitutes the important element of the content of education more than the process of the education. The content of education refers to ‘something’ of what is instilled; and ‘a process of instilling’ refers to the method and the system by which what is called ‘education’ is gradually imparted. Education encompasses the three fundamentals elements: the process, the content, and the recipient.

M. Kamal Hassan (1989, as cited in Langgulung & Noraini, 2008) describes education from the Islamic perspective, as a lifelong process of preparing an individual to actualize his role as a vicegerent or the khalifah of Allah on earth and thereby contribute fully to the reconstruction and development of the society in order to achieve well-being in this world and the Hereafter.

The researcher strongly believes that the function of Islamic schools should endeavour to teach and help students acquire different aspects of knowledge within the parameters of Islam through the use of a well-designed curriculum.

The National Curriculum aims at inculcating values among citizens as a way of promoting unity

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1 Norfaezah Mohd Hamidin, PhD in Education, Jabatan Bahasa dan Pembangunan Insan, Pusat Pengajian Teras, norfaezah@kuis.edu.my
in the nation. It is, "... an educational programme that includes curriculum and co-curricular activities which encompasses all the knowledge, skills, norms, values, cultural elements and beliefs to help develop a pupil fully with respect to the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects as well as to inculcate and develop desirable moral values and to transmit knowledge" (Education Act, 1996).

Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. For the benefit of all Malaysians, the phrase ‘belief in and devotion to God’ needs to be interpreted with some latitude (Rosnani Hashim, 2004). The National Curriculum aims are in line with the philosophy of Islamic Education. It states,

“Education is an on-going effort towards developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner based on the Quran and the Sunnah. It aims to produce individuals who are intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically balanced and harmonious, pious and God-society that is morally upright, knowledgeable, united, and responsible. It also endeavours to produce individuals capable of achieving success in this world and in the Hereafter as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and prosperity of the society and nations as vicegerents of Allah” (p.134).

Since the 1980s, the Malaysian education system has gradually undergone a process of transformations in various aspects. New curricula were established, new approaches and strategies for teaching and learning were set up, and teachers were given proper training, and many other improvements were made. The 1982 New Primary School Curriculum (NPSC) was formulated to provide equal opportunity to students to acquire basic skills and knowledge in addition to inculcate noble moral values. Meanwhile, the 1988 New Secondary School Integrated Curriculum (NSSIC) is based on the National Education Philosophy. The objectives are to create a wholesome individual with high moral values.

In the 1996 Education Act, the status of Arabic study is clearly defined. It is stated as follows (Education Ministry of Malaysia, 1996): Section 2. (d) Where facilities for the teaching of – Arabic, Japanese, German or French or any foreign language can be made available if deemed logical and practical (p. 17).

The implementation of Arabic as a subject in school is noted in the Education Regulation (Education Curriculum) 1997, which states that “Arabic Communication” is an additional subject and “High Arabic Language” is an elective subject (Education Ministry Malaysia, 1997). The Education Regulation (Education Curriculum) 1997 provided at least a minimum of six lessons a week for the “Arabic Communication” subject with a duration of 40 minutes per lesson. Meanwhile, for “High Arabic Language”, an allocation of four times a week was given, with a duration of 40 minutes for each lesson.

Problem Statement

Although Arabic is important and steps have been taken to help students master the language, the issue of Arabic proficiency as a foreign language or second language in Malaysia is never ending and has always been the concern of policy makers and interested groups. Students’ performance in Arabic language at all levels of education in Malaysia is still poor and not satisfactory (Ahmad Hassan, 2000). The previous studies documented many problems encountered during the teaching and learning of Arabic language in school. Traditional methodologies such as memorisation, reading and grammar-translation were also extended to teaching Arabic language which was also observed by Anida (2003) and Khalid (2004). Osman Khalid (1993) asserted that the cause of the weaknesses among students in
Arabic language included students’ interest, the way of learning, attitude and perception of students, and aspects of teaching and learning Arabic language in class. Mowafak (1998) suggested that the use of the communicative method must be highlighted and this is parallel with the study by Nik Rahimi and Kamarulzaman (2000) about the success of teaching Arabic when the Islamic Education subject is taught in the Arabic language.

As mentioned earlier, studies have shown that the problem of mastering the Arabic language in school is caused by many weaknesses which may be contributed by the teaching and learning process. However, the discussion of studies in teaching and learning Arabic language in school rarely revolved on perception of students, teachers and parents towards teaching and learning Arabic language in school. Perception is the process, act or faculty of perceiving or the effect or product of perceiving. Students’ perceptions are important to guide the process of learning Arabic language in fulfilling their needs. Indeed, teachers’ perceptions are important in the process of teaching Arabic language. Amel Shoaib & Zoltan Dornyei (2005) in their study revealed that teachers, however, have been noted as the only contributor to the children’s success in grasping this language. This study identifies two factors as salient motives which are less frequently mentioned in the second language literature where one is parental influence, thus underscoring the importance of the home environment in the learning of a second language. Parents become role models to children to be good or bad in their lives. Same goes to early education in childhood. If they want their children to improve in learning Arabic in school, they must become the initiators to ensure their children’s success in learning Arabic language.

Nik Azis (2002, as cited in Jamiah, 2013) mentions that the strength of the family depends on the family members, and the most significant among them are the parents. Parenting is the most challenging role for any parent because it is an extensive educational process. It is about the parents’ ability to foster overall stage of their children’s development (Brooksm, 2008). Good parenting refers to the parents’ achievement in developing the potential of their children to make them individuals with strong faith, good ethics of conduct, and that they benefit others.

Children have their own rights from their parents. Fathers are responsible to their family members; mothers are responsible to the family members, while the children are responsible for both their parents. Children have the right to receive proper education as Rasulullah SAW said: “It is a duty of the family to inculcate proper education in his son”. Consequently, parents must also shield their children from hellfire (Quran, at-Tahrin: 6) because each child is born in a state of fitrah (innate goodness), but it is the parents who will make him a Jew or Christian (Sahih al-Bukhari & Muslim). Ultimately, children’s education is the parents’ responsibility (Jamiah, 2013).

In this regard, there are two types of education: formal education and informal education. Formal education is the teaching conducted at school or educational organisation. Meanwhile informal education means learning through experience (Abdul Fatah, 2007). Both types of education are equally important and it serves to complement each other to produce great individuals. However, education in a family is of a greater concern because the family is the basis of human development and plays the most significant role from the time human beings are conceived until they die (Jamiah, 2013). This study therefore, would emphasise parents’ responsibilities in supporting learning the Arabic language because they are part of the solution to understand about Arabic language in the family institution. Furthermore, the parents’ responsibilities are rarely discussed in any prior studies. Therefore, their responsibilities towards teaching and learning can contribute to the success of learning the Arabic language in school. The study of the direct method towards teaching and learning Arabic at home hopefully can determine the right position of process teaching and learning Arabic in schools according to the early child education. So, the problems arising would be fixed with home schooling. Therefore, this study seeks to develop the direct method in learning Arabic language based on home schooling.
The Direct Method

The direct method of teaching, which is sometimes called the natural method, and is often (but not exclusively) used in teaching foreign languages, refrains from using the learners' native language and uses only the target language. The Direct Method (DM) is a language teaching method. Through this method, students are directly taught with the target language without using the native language. Normally, in Malaysia, Arabic language is taught using the grammar translation method at school. This method involves the translation of literary texts followed by explanations (in the students’ native language) of the rules of grammar.

Students start to learn the Arabic language formally at the age of seven years in primary schools from Standard 1 until Standard 6. Butin secondary school, the Arabic language is not offered at all secondary schools in Malaysia, except for some schools based on religious foundation like the National Religious Secondary Schools or Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama (SMKA), Islamic religious schools or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR).

The researcher believes that Arabic language education should start at an early stage beginning at home by parents before sending them to school to learn the language. It is crucial to make the Arabic language as a living language or second language besides Bahasa Melayu. Imam Al-Ghazali said to “educate your child about the reality of life since they are small”.

Teaching is a responsibility as Rasulullah SAW said: “Tell even one word” (Hadith narrated by Imam Bukhārī). Then, learning Arabic language becomes farḍu ‘ayn in a Muslim’s life. Islam has guided the way of life including how to approach learning the Arabic language. Three well-known approaches in language learning are the grammar translation method, the direct method, and the aural-oral method.

A later approach is the direct method, in which classes are taught entirely in the target language; grammar is taught inferentially and plays a secondary role to oral communication. This approach, which was popular in many countries throughout the nineteenth century (Allen & Corder, 1975, 18 as cited in Richard M.Felder & Eunice R.Henriques, 1995), is almost purely inductive. By its very nature, language acquisition is more likely to manifest in oral fluency than in correct utilisation of the written language and conversely for language learning.

The Arabic language can be easily applied through the direct method to introduce the words and phrases. Children at home are often educated with a lot of do’s and do not’s by their parents. Therefore, it is reliable to speak with small children using the Arabic language besides their native language (Bahasa Melayu).

Parents as Educators

Parents are the finest role models for their children. Children mostly imitate their p’rents' attitude, values and character. Rasulullah SAW and his Companions illustrated the very best example to their children. The strong faith they possessed manifested their strength to comply with any revelation from Allah without fail (Jamiah, 2013). Therefore, parents are encouraged to teach their children by themselves about the belief of Allah and the faith of iman.

All parents should have basic Arabic knowledge. Before marriage, Islam has established bases and rules for both of the suitor and the bride. If they follow them and take them as guidelines, the marriage would be successful and flourishing, and the family would be faithful, exhibiting good morals, and secure (Abd-Allah Nasih Ulwan, 2001). Furthermore, those who will be married should equip themselves with the Arabic language to ensure Islamic education among their children. Quran is narrated in Arabic language. Therefore, learning Arabic becomes farḍu ‘ayn and compulsory because it is related to Islam and the Quran as guidance. Learning Arabic strengthens the understanding of the Quran and
Hadith.

Among the advantages of learning Arabic, parents can verify what their children have learnt in school. The mothers’ education and the priority that should be given to mothers’ education as her primary role on a child are essential. Mothers should be able to teach Arabic to their children when they are at home. Islam recognises the mothers’ role and the sacrifice they make in pregnancy, giving birth, breast feeding (Quran, Luqmān:14 and Quran, Al’Aḥqāf: 15), nurturing and raising their children (Quran, Al-Qaṣaṣ: 7-13). Taking this cue and highest regards for the mother, Islamic teaching upholds that the paradise for the children lies at the feet of their mothers (An-Nasāʾi: 3104) and this ultimately position mothers at the highest position among mankind (Ṣaḥḥ al-bukhāri: 5971).

The basic qualities of an educator are divided into five: Sincerity, Piety, Knowledge, Patience, and Feeling Responsible. The basic qualities which should characterise the parents so that their influence on children may be more effective, and the latter’s response to parents’ advises may be better (Abd-Allah Nasih Ulwan, 2001).

1) Sincerity
Parents as educators have to be sincere to Allah in every educational act they undertake, whether it is a command, prohibition, advice, observation, or punishment. Sincerity in saying and doing is one of the bases of belief, and a requirement in Islam, without which Allah does not accept any deed. It was also in equivocal command in Allah Almighty’s Book and in the words of Rasulullah SAW.

2) Piety
Among the most important qualities of an educator is that of piety, which is defined by eminent scholars as “May Allah not see you where He prohibited you to be, and not miss you where He commanded you to be”.

3) Knowledge

Among the matters which no two people would differ about is that an educator should be knowledgeable of the principles of education with which Islamic Shariʿah (Jurisprudence) came. Parents should also be knowledgeable about the lawful and unlawful, the principles of morality, the Islamic system, and the rulings of jurisprudence. This is because knowledge about all of these makes an educator a wise scholar who places things in their right place, rears children on their principles and requirements, goes along the way of reformation and education on a firm ground of the teachings of the Quran and the guidance of Rasulullah SAW.

4) Patience

Among the basic qualities which help make an educator successful in his mission is equilibrium and patience, by which a child is attracted to his parents, and responds to the saying of his parents, acquires praiseworthy manners and abandons hateful ones.

5) Feeling Responsible
Islam has given fathers and mothers and all educators the responsibility of education in its widest sense, and has warned them that Allah Almighty will hold them accountable for discharging this responsibility on the Day of Judgement.

**Childhood Education and Home Schooling**

Children are entrusted by Allah to every parent (Ekram and Mohamad, 2007, as cited in Jamiah, 2013). Family is the best place to support and develop one’s mental health, emotion, intellectual capability, school performance and self-esteem (Posse & Melgosa, 2001, as cited in Jamiah, 2013). Child education begins at home and family is the basis of a child’s intellectual development (Sidek, 2009). The process of educating children is then transferred to the school institutions and this continuous process is essential to ensure that the children will succeed in the development of their personalities; a part of succession and progression initiated by parents at home. Children should be encouraged to learn integrative knowledge starting from childhood. The knowledge to manage oneself must be learned together with the knowledge to manage the system (Sidek, 2009, as cited in Jamiah, 2013).

Nowadays, busy parents should not neglect their children from getting the best education from them, even though they are very busy with duties. When they come back home, they should spend time with their children in the best quality time. Parent should carefully plan time for themselves and their children because it will form a healthy self-concept (Mariani et al., 2008, as cited in Jamiah, 2013). Being ignored is more painful and frightening for children than being in trouble and making anyone angry or upset. The feeling of unwanted or left out will make the children difficult to co-operate and break rules (Miler, 2004).

Mothers are mentioned as the first educational school for their children and have always been the most important figure in the family. Abu Hurairah narrated:

*One man comes to Rasulullah. He asked: “Messenger of Allah, to whom should I be dutiful?” Rasulullah replied, “Your mother.” He asked, “Then whom?” Rasulullah replied, “Your mother.” He asked, “Then whom?” He asked, “Then whom?” Rasulullah replied, “Your father and then the next closest relative and then the next.”*  

(Sahih al-Bukhari : 5971)

Parenting skills is not only exclusive to mothers whereby fathers also play an equally important role in nurturing the children (Magill-Evans, Harrison, Benzies, Gierel, & Kimak, 2007). Evidently, the fathers’ involvement is influenced by the change of social structure when there is an increase of working mothers in the industries, both public and private sectors (Magill-Evans et al., 2007).

Home schooling is an option to solve the problems which arise among children’s education nowadays. Parents become the first institute of education instead of school education which may not handle each problem matter for each student.

So, this paper strongly recommends that Arabic language should be taught by parents using the direct method. As an example, they should practise simple Arabic words with their children like in the dining room with the words “*makan*” and “*minum*” translated into Arabic commands، كُلُّ (kul) when wanting them eat and عُصْرَبُ (ishrab) when wanting them to drink. It should be practised continuously until the children can repeat the words and phrases. Parents should use the Arabic language while communicating with their children at home in helping to understand Arabic at school. The Arabic language should be taught as a living language, so they can understand the Arabic language in action. Arabic language and Islamic religion could not be separated because what Allah said in the Quran should
be taught by parents to inculcate Islamic teaching among their children by using the Arabic language in command and prohibit something. It shows the importance of parents’ contribution in helping their children towards success in learning Arabic.

**Conclusion**

The problem with the teaching and learning process in Arabic language should be resolved in the correct way. The one who can solve this problem with home schooling are parents. Early education in childhood to know Allah by His Word (Quran) will prepare an individual to actualise his role as a vicegerent or the khalifah of Allah on earth and thereby contribute fully to the reconstruction and development of his society in order to achieve well-being in this world and in the Hereafter. With this knowledge, he can manage himself, and lastly manage the system in this world properly in line with the Quran and Hadith.

Education is a lifelong process, it is not confined to the school, but is required to be continuous until one’s death. So, parents who live with their children, should educate them with the best education. Children should be educated with what Allah commanded and prohibited in the Quran since they are small. When they become older, the learning process to educate may be harder. An early start with Arabic commands and Arabic prohibitions may prevent them from being ignorant khalifahs of Allah.

The secret recipe of success in home schooling are parents have sincerity, good attention, do’a for the lineage (ذرية) to become knowledgeable in Arabic, and seek knowledge. Add the do’a to make children understand Arabic clearly. Parents should not shun from speaking Arabic with the direct method at home, because it is not impossible. Arabic learning syllabus should be designed by the policy makers and interested groups to help parents educate their children at home. Home schooling with the motto, “Now Everyone Can Speak Arabic”, can reduce dependency to the school and give new substance in teaching Malaysia’s young generation with this language. Hopefully this message can achieve its’ mission, that is to start early education of Arabic language learning begining at home.

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