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Exploring AFL Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Arabic Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

The extent of one's vocabulary and the depth of one's knowledge of a term are two of the most important factors in one's command of the language. The focus of this study is on the vocabulary-teaching practices of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) teachers. Narrative inquiry is used in this study to provide insight on the challenges faced by AFL teacher, the strategies, and the evaluations when seeking to instruct their students in Arabic vocabulary. Several AFL teachers use singing and role-play strategies to introduce students to Arabic vocabulary. Using a number of applications and google form media, teachers can administer puzzle games as a means of assessing their students' knowledge.

Keywords: *Arabic Vocabulary, Language Teaching, Vocabulary Acquisition*

ABSTRAK

Luasnya kosa kata seseorang dan kedalaman pengetahuan seseorang tentang suatu istilah adalah dua faktor terpenting dalam penguasaan bahasa seseorang. Fokus penelitian ini adalah pada praktik pengajaran kosakata bahasa Arab sebagai guru Bahasa Asing (AFL). Inkuiri naratif digunakan dalam penelitian ini untuk memberikan wawasan tentang tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru AFL, strategi, dan evaluasi ketika berusaha untuk mengajar siswa mereka dalam kosa kata bahasa Arab. Beberapa guru AFL menggunakan strategi bernyanyi dan bermain peran untuk memperkenalkan siswa pada kosa kata bahasa Arab. Dengan menggunakan beberapa aplikasi dan media google form, guru dapat mengadministrasikan permainan puzzle sebagai sarana penilaian pengetahuan siswanya.

Kata Kunci: Kosakata Bahasa Arab, Pengajaran Bahasa, Penguasaan Kosakata

Introduction

Teaching Arabic vocabulary has become a significant concern in education worldwide (Berrichi & Mazroui, 2021; Masrai & Milton, 2019) throughout the past half-century. For example, in Indonesia there are several studies on teaching Arabic vocabulary: online game (Kamal, 2021), media (Amalia, Nuha, Nashoih, 2022), alternative model (Ritonga, Ritonga, Wahyuni, & Julhadi, 2022), and module (Yusof, Baharudin, Hamzah, & Malek, 2021). So, the teaching of Arabic vocabulary has become an important study in various aspects.

Having a large enough vocabulary makes it possible to express oneself clearly and concisely. Whereas it is impossible to convey ideas in writings that are incomprehensible and sentences that are confusing if one does not have a good grasp of the language and a large vocabulary. Mc Carthy (1988) asserts that a student's grasp of a language's grammar is meaningless unless he or she also has a solid vocabulary. The reason for this is that meaning cannot be conveyed in speech without the use of words.

Several vocab-focused studies (Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2014) acknowledge the difficulty of making connections and providing explanations between terms. This is because there is so much about the word's structure, meaning, and function that must be learned in order to fully harness its potential for positive effect. Obviously, most students struggle the most with these foundational aspects of vocabulary acquisition. It's challenging to master all areas of vocabulary for pupils of a second or foreign language (Nation, 2001). This could be because there is such a wide range of vocabulary words to learn. Vocabulary acquisition, as discussed by Kieffer & Montecillo (2012), is a lengthy and intricate procedure. Vocabulary knowledge, thus, can be characterized as word understanding and the skill to utilize words effectively and effortlessly in one's everyday life. As a result, having this information is essential for expanding one's vocabulary.

Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population in the world, has realized the importance of teaching its citizens the Arabic language. Teaching the Arabic language, which is considered an international language, is required by the national curriculum. It is hoped that the incorporation of Arabic language study at a young age will help students better comprehend and practice their Islamic faith. But as the world evolves and more people seek jobs and further education in the Middle East, fluency in Arabic is becoming increasingly desirable.

Teaching Arabic is regulated in KMA (Minister of Religion Decree) No. 183 of 2019. In KMA 183 it is stated that Arabic language teaching aims to prepare students who can use Arabic as a global communication tool and a tool to explore religion from different countries (Ministry of Religion, 2019). Zurqoni, Retnawati, Rahmatullah, Djidu, & Apino (2020) emphasized the importance of learning Arabic in Indonesia, noting that it is taught as a required subject everywhere from *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) to *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA). However, just because schools provide Arabic classes does not mean all students will graduate with advanced language skills in the language.

Teaching and learning in the Arabic language curriculum are planned according to learning outcomes in the same way that it is in the curricula of other courses. It is based on the desired outcomes of the required curriculum. One of the stated aims of the Arabic language curriculum is the development of students' linguistic competence. Foreign language proficiency in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing has become the standard by which people are judged. The cognitive, psychomotor, and affective levels of each learner are taken into account while designing classes to improve language proficiency. High, intermediate, and low proficiency are the three main categories. Students of all levels need to improve their language abilities so that they can communicate with others in an appropriate and effective manner. Vocabulary acquisition and understanding are essential for effective language use because of the importance of using a wide variety of words and phrases.

To that end, many initiatives have been launched to provide students with resources to improve their vocabulary. Sokmen (1997) argued that students can benefit from efforts to analyze real-world language elements. These methods have been found to be effective by both Cunningsworth (1995) and Al-Qahtani (2015) in assisting students with their vocabulary development. This work yields a framework of key components that are linked to the desired vocabulary-learning abilities, or Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS).

Literature Review

Arabic language vocabulary: Issues and Problems

Since the introduction of Arabic as a subject in primary and secondary schools, students have struggled with writing and communicating in Arabic. The inability

to fully grasp Arabic terminology in the classroom hinders students' ability to read, write, and speak the language effectively. Zurqoni, Retnawati, Rahmatullah, Djidu, & Apino (2020) demonstrate that students' poor Arabic vocabulary knowledge impairs their proficiency in all aspects of language acquisition, including speaking, reading, and listening. It was also noted that students' language comprehension in Arabic class was subpar. Vocabulary size is related to several linguistic abilities, including hearing, reading, and writing, as described by Staehr (2008). Meanwhile, the ability to use a broader range of vocabulary can aid in a variety of communication-related endeavors (Barcroft, 2004). Based on these results, it is clear that learning new words is crucial when studying a new language.

Unlike the widely spoken language of Indonesia, Arabic is not utilized in any contexts outside of formal education. Grammar and sentence form are typically emphasized in the classroom. According to Nation (1990), students' and teachers' focus on one component of the language at the expense of others has contributed to their struggles in learning it. Therefore, educators have stopped placing a premium on drill and practice and the use of word associations to help students remember new terminology.

Furthermore, Harun & Zawawi (2014) found that students' inadequate vocabulary acquisition prevents instruction in Arabic from accomplishing the required curriculum purpose. Students' disinterest in learning the language stems from their inability to adequately communicate in the language (Nunan, 1991). Therefore, the purpose of this research is to look at teachers' experiences who has been teaching students in Arabic for a while.

Arabic Language Vocabulary Teaching

Vocabulary is sometimes overlooked since it is considered a sub-skill in language learning, yet it is essential, especially for effective communication in writing and speech (Che Radiah, 2009). In order to compose an excellent "maqal," or essay, writers need to acquire a large vocabulary that allows them to construct meaningful words and sentences. Full sentences in Arabic can be constructed using the words "*fi'il*," "*ismu*," and "*harf*."

When teaching Arabic words, or so-called Arabic vocabulary, Al-Shuwairekh (2001) identifies three crucial aspects to focus on. The characteristics are the following: 1) a foundational understanding of words and reference words

(*wazan*); 2) an understanding of the concept and morphological system; and 3) the ability to correctly pronounce short vowels (*tasykil*).

When trying to decipher an Arabic word, it's important to keep in mind these five characteristics. Similarities between these criteria and the vocabulary learning strategies proposed by Cohen (1990), Gu & Johnson (1996), Schmit (1997), Nation (2001), and Taka (2008). The process of learning Arabic is comparable to that of learning other languages, such as Indonesian or English. The amount of vocabulary learned and the level of comprehension a student has of a given word also have an impact on the methods used to study Arabic.

Theoretical Framework: Schmitt and Takač Vocabulary Learning Strategies

VLS is an approach that can be utilized as a tactic for learning a new language's vocabulary. This approach was based initially on language-learning strategies and then expanded to cover vocabulary. The effectiveness of various VLS varies widely from one person to the next.

Schmitt (1997) claimed that VLS analyzed the first stage of vocabulary learning and acquisition and categorized it into different components to guarantee efficiency of use. The two facets of perception and production are also shown in this categorization. The system relies on the dissimilarity in finding and combining information. Vocabulary learning is broken down into two categories by VLS: There are two main approaches to vocabulary acquisition: 1) the discovery strategy, which entails learning the meaning of new words, and 2) the strengthening strategy, which entails learning and remembering the meaning of already-known terms.

There are two kinds of strategies that parallel the distinction between vocabulary expansion and reinforcement described by Nation (2001). Vocabulary expansion helps students acquire new words and their meanings and builds on their existing vocabularies by reiterating and expanding upon what they already know. The two primary strategies (i.e., determination and social) are layered on top of memory, cognitive, and meta-cognitive strategies under this umbrella. Based on research conducted in the field of language acquisition by Oxford (1990), Schmitt's Taxonomy of VLS (1997) was developed. Schmitt (1997) distinguishes between two broad groups of vocabulary-learning strategies: 1) Discovery strategy (strategies that explores the meaning of the word); 2) Consolidation strategy (strategies that consolidate the new words in which the

words found are strengthened by memorizing technique).

Then, within these two primary groups, there are a further five classifications: 1) Determination strategy (individual self-study that tried to find the meaning of a word without the help of others); 2) Social strategy (the process of learning new words through social interaction); 3) Memory strategy (the students associate the learning new words with the existing knowledge or background of new words using mental process); 4) Cognitive strategy (strategy that does not involve students in mental processing, but using a more mechanical way); 5) Metacognitive strategy (strategy that involves monitoring and evaluating the outcome of the progress made).

There are a number of benefits to employing Schmitt's (1997) VLS taxonomy. It has the potential to be standardized as a test, 2) be used to easily collect student data, 3) be based on the theory of learning strategies and memory theory, 4) be easy and practical in its coding, classification, and management of data, 5) be applicable to students from a wide range of backgrounds, 6) be thorough and sensitive to a wide range of learning strategies, and 7) permit comparison with previous studies (Catalan, 2003). When it comes to learning new words, many people find success by employing the Schmitt Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997). Productivity, creativity, and company culture are just a few examples of where VLS classification has been put to use. This is because of external factors that may shape how pupils approach terminology (Schmitt, 2000).

The VLS proposed by Taka (2008) are the most up-to-date methods currently available. An inventory questionnaire designed to gauge the prevalence of various approaches to learning a foreign language emerged from his series of investigations. There was a rise in interest in vocabulary research, which resulted in widespread implementation of the Vocabulary Learning Strategy for Elementary School Questionnaire (VOLSQES). This is a survey about how elementary school students might learn new words. Vocabulary acquisition strategies are broken down into three groups, according to Taka (2008): 1) The formal learning vocabulary memorization technique, remembering and met a cognitive; 2) Self-study of vocabulary that is the strategy that exposes students directly to the target language with their own efforts such as checking dictionary, taking notes while reading, associating the word with a physical object or environment, imagining the meaning of the word and use new words in sentences; 3) Learning incidental or spontaneous vocabulary in situations that occur in the

natural learning.

Taka's classification model suggests that students routinely employ tactics for learning English vocabulary such as reading and rereading relevant materials, searching the internet for definitions, using synonyms in everyday speech, and listening to music in the target language. Students of the German language, on the other hand, are more likely to employ more structured approaches to learning vocabulary, including self-revision outside of class, self-test, self-test with a list of terms, study groups, and linking the word with physical items. As a result, Taka's analysis led him to the conclusion that picking and using an appropriate strategy for learning a foreign language's vocabulary is crucial. Therefore, although there are numerous vocabulary learning methodologies, the most important aspects of the strategy for learning a foreign language's (L3) or second language's (L2) vocabulary are the students' own cognitive reasoning and determination in vocabulary acquisition.

Research Methods

In this study, a qualitative strategy was employed. Because of its reliance on narratives to explain human behavior, the research strategy employed here is known as "narrative inquiry." According to Yuan and Lee (2016), narrative inquiry investigates the ways in which educators use narratives to share their experiences and grow as individuals. Narrative inquiry has emerged as a practical method for studying education by focusing on the lives and work of educators (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). In addition to providing their own unique perspectives on their experiences, instructors use narrative to envision alternate futures for themselves.

Furthermore, participants were gathered using convenience sampling. I reached out to potential contributors to discuss terms for contributing their teaching experiences. AFL Teachers in Islamic secondars schools in East Java, Central Java, and West Java, Indonesia. The potential volunteers are acquainted with the researchers (either as colleagues or as students). It is intended that the intimacy will allow the participants to speak their minds more openly. Participants were requested to fill out the google form with their demographic information once they agreed to participate in the study. My target audience consists of more than 45 AFL teachers. Fourteen AFL teachers volunteered to take part. My next

step was to add them to the WhatsApp circle. However, only ten teachers offered to talk about their experiences after the briefing. After the data was sorted, only six teachers were chosen.

Name	Gender	Teaching Experience	Age	Educational Background
A	Female	5 years	30 years	Arabic Language Education
B	Male	4 years	28 years	Arabic Language Education
C	Female	2 years	27 years	Arabic Language Education
D	Female	2 years	29 years	Arabic Language Education
E	Female	3 years	29 years	Arabic Language Education
F	Male	4 years	30 years	Arabic Language Education

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because they are frequently employed in studies of language education and instruction. According to Richard (2003), researchers can make use of available resources anyway they see fit, including following established interview protocols with a set of standard questions to ask participants. Thematic analysis was used to sift through interview transcripts, analyse the data, and draw conclusions about the topics discussed.

Interview data was coded and evaluated for patterns. In addition, the goals of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research method include describing, exploring, and discovering a reality that is simultaneously subjective and individual and socially produced.

Results and Discussion

The results in this study are classified into 3 main themes, namely challenges, strategies, and evaluation.

Experience 1: Challenges in teaching Arabic vocabulary

There are various challenges faced by AFL teachers when teaching Arabic vocabulary. Among them is the low competence of students because they come from different educational backgrounds. This is what participant (A) said;

> *"These students come from a wide range of educational backgrounds. They don't all come from Islamic boarding schools or madrasas. So that some of them have difficulty spelling hijaiyah letters and pronouncing them are not in accordance with the makhorijul huruf and tajwid rules"*

Students from public schools more often experience difficulties in reading Arabic vocabulary, because they do not have this subject. Whereas students from madrasas or Islamic boarding schools find it easier to read and memorize Arabic vocabulary because there are many subjects related to Arabic such as nahwu, shorof, etc. Zurqoni, Retnawati, Rahmatullah, Jitu, & Apino (2020) indicate that students in public schools provide a difficulty for school stakeholders, notably instructors, due to a lack of linguistic preparation in Arabic. Teachers had to put in extra time and effort to create first reading-writing skills and vocabulary mastery with their students since their students' knowledge was so restricted that they could not yet benefit from teaching in the speaking skills.

The lack of supporting learning media is also one of the challenges in teaching Arabic vocabulary. This is as stated by participant (C):

> *"When teaching Arabic vocabulary, many educators rely solely on textbooks. The primary issue influencing this is a failure to be creative. This causes students to get disinterested and bored while studying Arabic words."*

This is reinforced by sholihah (2017) which shows that the Arabic vocabulary learning problems faced by teachers are very complex and one of the factors that influence it is lack of Arabic vocabulary learning media used by teacher. Teachers' ability to go outside the box in order to pique their students' curiosity about Arabic is crucial if they want to see their students succeed.

Experience 2: Strategies in teaching Arabic vocabulary

Most teachers did not use any innovative methods of instruction, instead relying solely on lecture, translation, and explanation, and justified their choices by citing a lack of time and an overwhelming workload. Students' interest in learning Arabic is hurt by outdated methods and shortages of resources. After all, the Arabic language is widely regarded as a challenging topic in and of itself. Teachers need to be innovative with their lesson plans if they want their students to develop an interest in learning Arabic. Mehta (2009) agreed that it is challenging to acquire a foreign language's vocabulary, hence he recommended that students be given engaging and fun vocabulary exercises.

Any AFL teacher has the weighty duty of inspiring students to learn the language. It is important to use discretion when responding to difficulties. Various strategies have been used by AFL teachers to foster students' interest in learning Arabic vocabulary. Among them is the singing strategy. This is as stated by participant (D):

> *"By singing, students are more enthusiastic and easier to remember the Arabic vocabulary they are learning."*

This is supported by participant (B):

> *"When my students were asked about the vocabulary that had been taught with the singing strategy, the majority could answer it fluently."*

Therefore, since the singing technique creates a lively and enjoyable classroom environment, it can increase students' motivation to learn. So, expanding one's lexicon with Arabic words is fun.

In addition to singing strategies, teachers also often use role playing strategies. As stated by participant (E):

> *"I explain the meaning of new vocabulary by taking on the roles of other people, or asking students to play the roles they want. For example, the teacher plays the role of a patient who has a stomachache, then is examined by a doctor. By dramatizing a role this can help students optimize their own and group skills, both linguistic, social and artistic.*

Teachers are encouraged by Che Radiah and Norhayuza (2011) to use language games in the classroom. Vocabulary and phrases involving other language abilities like speaking, writing, and reading are especially amenable to memorization through games. Mehta (2009) argues that in order to help students develop their own methods of memorizing and using new vocabulary, teachers must be innovative in designing engaging activities and vocabulary exercises. An adaptable teacher is one who can make the most of limited resources in any given situation, as defined by Adenan and Khairuddin (2012).

Experience 3: Evaluations in teaching Arabic vocabulary

The goal of learning evaluation is to determine the degree to which a learning system achieves its stated aims and objectives using the most appropriate and efficient combination of components (such as learning objectives, learning materials, teaching strategies, learning environments, and assessment tools). A teacher's ability to analyze student progress toward learning goals through evaluation is crucial for determining whether or not instruction is producing the desired results.

Putra (2013) revealed that evaluations given to students were often in the form of formative, substantive and summative tests causing extreme fear, stress and anxiety. The evaluation that is presented often makes students feel tense and even unable to complete the test properly. Evaluation activities are not merely an

activity of working on test questions. Basrowi and Siskandar (2012) emphasized that learning evaluation is said to be an art because it can be done in various ways, methods, models, strategies, and test tools (instruments). One way that can be used to carry out evaluation is by playing. Playing in this context is not merely recreational-oriented play, but educational play. In playing, one feels involved and called upon to overcome difficulties and solve problems. More importantly, in playing, one gets pleasure, so that the activities of overcoming and solving problems take place in an atmosphere of joy, without pressure (Asrori, 2013).

From the description explained above, there is a need for innovation related to evaluation media that can be applied in learning Arabic vocabulary. Among them is by using a puzzle game as expressed by participant (A):

> *"After I taught about Arabic vocabulary, I ended by presenting a puzzle game in the form of a power point or flashcard. Not infrequently, I also use the quizzez and kahoot applications. This aims to evaluate the extent of their understanding of what I have taught. The students were very enthusiastic in answering them."*

Apart from puzzle games, there are also teachers who evaluate learning Arabic vocabulary by using the Google form media as expressed by participant (F):

> *"With the Google form media, it really helps me to evaluate the Arabic vocabulary of students because this media provides various features and also Arabic fonts. In addition, how to access it is also not complicated."*

The use of the Google Form platform as a medium for evaluation materials is very practical. Apart from being very practical, the use of the Google Forms platform also makes it easier for teachers to give grades to students, because Google Forms can also score answers to questions given (Amalia, 2019).

Conclusion

Teaching a foreign language's vocabulary (e.g., Arabic vocabulary) is a challenging endeavor due to the complexity of the target language, the words themselves, and the linguistic patterns within the target language. When

considering how to best teach and learn a new vocabulary, it is important to keep in mind three main factors: word forms, word meanings, and word distributions.

There are various challenges faced by AFL teachers in teaching Arabic vocabulary, such as low student competency and the unavailability of adequate learning media. The Arabic vocabulary teaching strategies that are often used by AFL teachers are singing and role-playing strategies. And to evaluate the extent of student understanding, AFL teachers can use puzzle games by utilizing various applications and google form media. So that with a teaching strategy and learning evaluation that is not monotonous, it is hoped that it can foster students' interest and motivation in learning Arabic vocabulary.

About the Authors

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