THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING METHOD IN TEACHING ARABIC LANGUAGE ON STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effect of Differentiated Learning Method (DLM) on students' motivation towards studying the Arabic language (AL) as a foreign language in Malaysia. The participants in this study were 100 (47 males and 53 females) Malaysian form four students attending secondary school in Kolej Islam Sultan Alam Shah (KISAS). They were selected for this study to determine the effect of DLM on their motivation towards studying AL. The pre-and post-questionnaire comparison groups design was used to determine if there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using DLM based on the Universal Design of Learning model (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction model (DI), while the control group was taught using the Teacher Centered Method (TCM). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the effect of DLM on students' motivation towards studying AL. The statistical results demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the post-test between the experimental group (M=155.740, SD=12 .663) and the control group (M=145.280, SD= 14.405); t (3.856); p<.05). The experimental group was generally more motivated than the control group which proves that the DLM is an effective approach in improving students' motivation towards studying the Arabic Language as a foreign language in Malaysia.

Keywords

Differentiated Learning Method; Motivation; Arabic Language.

Academic Discipline and Sub-Disciplines

Education and Psychology; Teaching and learning

SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION

Study the effect of differentiated learning method (DLM) on students' motivation towards learning Arabic language as a foreign language.

TYPE (METHOD/APPROACH)

Experimental study; Questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic Language (AL) is one of the living languages which is a dominant and an official language for more than twenty countries. It is spoken by more than three hundred million people around the world. It is also one of the supported languages in the United Nations since 1973. Moreover, the number of people who speak AL is increasing each year, due to a variety of motives including religion, family, and identity [1, 2, 3].

In Malaysia, many people especially the Malay Muslim community have an interest in learning AL and they look at AL as a valuable and blessed language because it is the language of the holy Quran [4, 5, 6]. In addition, there are several studies carried out in Malaysia which showed that there are many factors which drive the learners to study AL as a foreign language. These include communicating with the Arabic people, understanding the Arabic culture, travel to Arab countries, or work in Arab countries. Most Muslims learn Arabic due to religious reasons, especially to understand Islam and read the Holy Quran [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. As a result, most parents, students, teachers and principals perceive and realize the importance of teaching and learning AL in Malaysia [5, 10, 11].

However, AL is not an easy subject to learn and to be taught especially when it comes to its grammar. In fact, AL is rich in grammatical structures and has a vast vocabulary of items that make it even more challenging to be taught and to be learned. Even the native speakers themselves deem it as challenging task to learn the grammar [12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17].

In Malaysia, most of the students face problems and challenges in studying AL as they do not have control of the major language skills, especially speaking, writing, and listening. Consequently, their motivation and performance in the AL learner are considered poor due to the fact that most of the students perceive the AL as the most difficult subject [6,11, 12, 18,19, 20, 21].

Therefore, in 2005, under the JQAF (Jawi-Quran-Arabic and Fardhu Ain) programme, the AL was introduced in the primary schools by the Minister of Education (MOE) for the sake of helping and encouraging students to master the AL [5].

In fact, teaching and learning AL is not a simple task [6]. Students' motivation and performance will deteriorate if the teachers do not conduct activities to determine the real reasons behind this deterioration [8]. Based on the literature review, some of the reasons include the method of teaching. Most of the Students comes to the class with initial interests and motivations toward AL but some teachers do not use appropriate methods to meet the students' interests to help elevate their motivation or at least maintain their initial level of motivation and interests. Most of the teachers use old and conventional ways and that is one of the reasons for students to perceive the AL as an uninteresting and an unwanted subject [8, 22]. Besides, most of the teachers were more concerned about finishing the curriculum on time without taking into consideration the students' interest and motivation or the method used to handle students' differences and needs [23, 24, 25].

Moreover, some of the Arabic books which are used in the teaching and learning of the AL as a foreign language in Malaysia need to be improved by adding various activities to meet students' interests and needs. Also the textbooks lacked activities that use modern aids and homework [26].

Learning any foreign language needs times, motivation and effort [27, 28] and there so many researches indicating that motivation plays a vital role in the learning process of any foreign language [27, 28, 29, 30]. Consequently, teachers should be aware of that fact and response accordingly. Strategies should be developed to motivate students so that they will be capable of independent learning [27]. In fact, students learning any subject need a variety of ways to illustrate the subject and help them to understand it in an easy way that makes sense during studying and learning [23] especially if the subject has its own instructions and complex grammar like the Arabic language [6, 8, 16].

As a matter of fact, students come to class with a certain degree of motivation to learn and they have their own view of success and motivation. Thus, the class and teaching environment have a direct impact on their level of motivation by which it can be increased or decreased [31, 32]. Hence, the best education and teaching method is the one which is based on students' interest that helps them to be engaged and motivated in learning [23, 33].

Students in a class are not all equal. They differ in physical characteristics, abilities, interest, experiences, personalities, and learning style. Hence, the students need a variety of strategies during learning in order to be more motivated and achieve better [24, 33].

DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING

Differentiated Learning is one of the teaching methods which has been accepted and set to work in education. DLM is a method which meets the students where they are and move forward to the next levels toward success. The Differentiated Learning Method (DLM) uses a variety of content, processes, products and strategies to capture students' interest and motivation towards learning [33, 34, 35]. DLM allows students to choose their learning process by providing them with differentiated contents, processes, and products, based on their interest and learning style. Besides that, the students in DLM can be a part of the teaching decision rather than only the teacher who controls everything inside the class [36, 37, 38]. Students in DLM are encouraged to share their information with the teacher and among the other students. Furthermore, Differentiated Learning students can choose how they want the class to be conducted and the subject to be taught. Students explore different ways of learning which helps them to take in information and make sense of the concept and the subject taught. Consequently, students learn more effectively with high level of interests and motivation [39].

There are three elements of the curriculum which can be differentiated to meet the learners' ability, interest, needs, prior knowledge, and readiness. DLM covers these elements by differentiating content, process, and products. Figure 1 presents the elements of DLM which has been used in the teaching of AL to the experimental group.
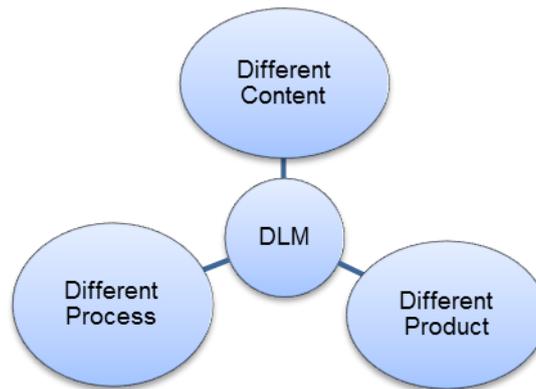
Fig1: Elements of DLM

Differentiated Content

Differentiation of content means providing students with several materials and activities to be used in teaching AL to meet students' differences, needs, performance levels, and interests while ensuring they comply with the text book learning objective. The textbook content can be modified and tailored to meet student needs through providing various materials with a various level of performance [33, 34, 40, 41]. Figure 2 presents the level of performance (A, B, & C) in AL.
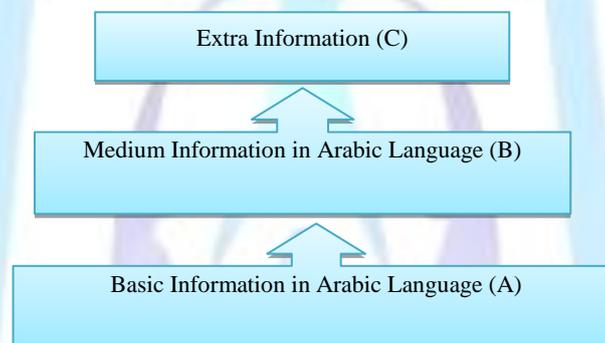

Fig 2: Differentiated Levels of Content in AL

Differentiated Process

Differentiation of process refers to how the lessons are going to be taught and learned based on students' learning style and needs. These include for example tiered level of activities, multiple assignments (A, B, C) (Figure 2), games such as crosswords, puzzles, fill in the blanks, cards, drawing, role playing, reading skills (oral reading, mumble reading, and role-play reading), discussions, problem-solving, group investigations, playing, and flexible grouping to develop knowledge [23, 33, 41]. Berger (1991) suggested that activities should be used in a variety of ways which should be interesting in order to make sense of content and to encourage students' self-directed learning [40].

Differentiated Product

Differentiation of product refers to the ways that the students can use to express and extend what they have learned in the class in order to master the content. Students can demonstrate their knowledge and ability in a wide variety of forms. Initial and on-going assessment of student readiness and growth are essential to their performance and learning. These include for example, Tiered product assignment, Independent study criteria, test/quiz, teach someone else what they have learned, draw pictures, combine pictures, oral speaking using Arabic language, make a puzzle or a crossword, make an ample list of vocabulary, sing Arabic song, free time speech using AL, discuss the unit' concepts in the group, and make presentations. Students can come up with any product which they prefer to apply [23, 33, 37, 40, 41].

DLM which has been used in this study was developed based on differentiated instruction model (DI) , some books, based on the textbook' form four objectives, and based on students' needs. The textbook' has been differentiated, with content process, product, and activities based on student' interests, differences, prior knowledge, and learning preference. Figure 3 represents the model of DLM which has been used in this study in teaching AL in Malaysia.
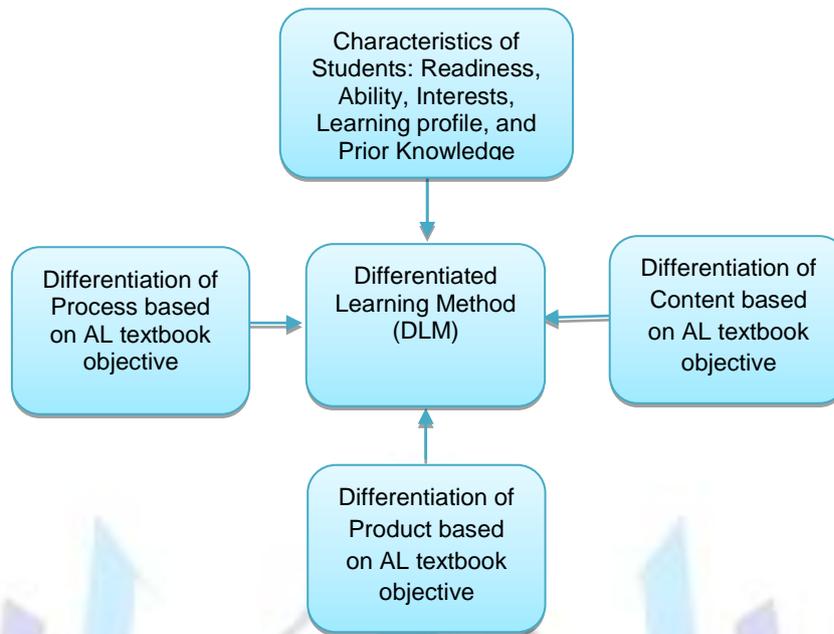
Fig 3: Model of the DLM

There are several studies which have used differentiated learning and it has been found that using differentiated methods in teaching and learning enhances students' motivation towards learning. It has been also found that using differentiated learning has an impact in capturing students' interest [41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46]. For instance, Hickerson, (2012), conducted a study using Differentiated homework in reading. The result showed that using differentiated methods helped motivate students towards homework and reading. It was also found that using differentiated homework helped to capture student's interests. Furthermore, the study recommended that the teachers had to assign motivating activities to capture students' interest and this factor would help students to be more motivated and achieve better results [46]. Cheng, (2006) used differentiated methods in teaching a foreign language (EFL) (Taiwanese) and the study found that using differentiated learning improved students' motivation compared to the teacher-directed lecture model [43]. Similar results were reported by Kondor (2007) who conducted research using multiple strategies for differentiation and found that using the differentiated method increased students' engagement and motivation in math [30].

It is apparent that using differentiated contents, processes, and products have a positive and constructive impact on students' motivation compared to using one method of teaching [33,41, 47].

METHOD AND DESIGN

The purpose of this paper was to examine the effect of DLM on students' motivation towards learning AL as a foreign language in Malaysia. This research was an experimental study using a quasi-experimental design, where two intact groups of students attending form four in a secondary school were chosen. The two intact groups were assigned randomly to the experimental and control groups. Table 1 illustrates the study design.

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Control Design

Groups	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental	O_1	X_1	O_2
Control	O_1	X_2	O_2

This research is a quasi-experimental research methodology which includes:

O1 = Pre-test Questionnaire

O2 = Post-test Questionnaire

X1 = Differentiated Learning Method (DLM) for the experimental group only.

X2 = Teacher Centered Method (TCM) for control group only.

The pre-test and post-test in this study were carried out to determine the effects of DLM on students' motivation in studying AL.

Participants

This study was conducted at Klang in Kolej Islam Sultan Alam Shah (KISAS) where the Arabic language is taught as a subject to form four students. The sample for this study were from four intact classes (n=100). The four classes were randomly selected from other classes and participants were randomly assigned into control and experimental groups. The control group with 50 students had 24 males and 26 females and the experimental group had 50 students with 23 males and 27 females. All the students were Malays and were of the same age group.

INSTRUMENTS

The data was collected using the instrumental questionnaire by Mori (2004) [48] and the Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) [49] based on the expectancy value theory of Eccles and Wigfield (1995) [50]. The questionnaire had seven dimensions of motivation: attainment value, study habits, extrinsic value, intrinsic value, cost value, ability beliefs, and expectancy for success. In this study, the questionnaire consisted of 39 items and all items were scored on a 5 point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition, the questionnaire was presented in English and the Malay language to accommodate the bilingual respondents as well as to ensure that the participants in this study completely understood the items written in their mother tongue.

RESULTS

This paper presents the effect of DLM in teaching and learning AL on students' motivation. The results showed that DLM had an effect on students' motivation towards studying AL. To evaluate the effectiveness, the differences between mean scores of motivation before and after the experimental treatment were determined using paired sample T-tests. The finding revealed that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group (Table 2).

Table 2. paired sample t-test for pre and post-test motivation in the experimental group

Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T	P
Pre-test	147.70	10.61			
Post-test	155.74	12.66	49	-4.12	. 000*

*p<.05

As can bee seen from the Table 2 there was a significant difference in the mean scores of motivation between the pre-test (*M*=147.70, SD=10 .61) and post-test (*M*=155.740, SD=12 .66), t (-4.12); *p*<.05) in the experimental group. In other words, the DLM had an effect on students' motivation towards studying AL.

Also the independent T-test was used to compare between the mean scores of motivation in post-test between the experimental and control groups. The findings revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores for the experimental and control groups (Table 3).

Table 3. Independent t-test for motivation between experimental and control groups

Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	P
Post-test	Experimental	50	155.740	12.663	98	.000*
Post-test	Control	50	145.280	14.405		

*P< .05

According to Table 3 it was evident that there was a significant difference in the post-test between the experimental group (*M*=155.740, SD=12 .663) and the control group (*M*=145.280, SD = 14.405); t (3.856); *p*<.05). The mean score for the post-test in the experimental group using DLM was higher than the mean score of the post-test for the control group using TCM. This implies that the DLM had an effect on students' motivation towards studying AL.

This study also showed that Malaysian students who participated in this study were aware of the importance of the AL, which resulted in a positive attitude towards learning AL. The results showed no significant differences in motivation between the males and females in studying the Arabic Language.

DISCUSSION

It was apparent that applying the Differentiated Learning Method (DLM) in teaching and learning Arabic language as a foreign language had a positive impact on students' motivation compared to teaching using the Teacher Centered Method (TCM).

Differentiated learning is an approach for teaching and learning that provides students with flexible and multiple options for taking information and moving it forward to make sense out of this information. It is an approach that can make learning flexible enough to be tailored and adopted to meet the needs of individuals and diverse students in the class. The result obtained can be explained by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model which facilitates students to access materials in easier ways based on their differences by using differentiated content, process and products. Providing

students with a variety of content materials, processes, and products helps students to be more motivated, enjoy the class, and at the same time it eliminates barriers which limit students' easy access to materials [33, 34, 37, 41, 51]. In fact, Differentiated Learning is an efficient and effective method in an increasingly diverse school [35]

As a matter of fact, the method of teaching has a direct effect on students' motivation to be increased or decreased. Differentiated Learning encourages teachers to provide multiple options for the students to choose from. Students who have multiple options for studying and doing homework, will be more interested and motivated towards studying compared to the conventional way of studying and doing homework which does not have multiple choices [46]. This is in line with Kondor (2007) who mentioned that using multiple strategies for differentiation increases students' engagement and motivation, particularly for the gifted and talented students. In fact, the success of teaching can be seen from how the students study easily while their motivation is in place during the class [30]. Also, Cheng (2006) found the same result as well. Using Differentiated curriculum and instruction improved English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation and interest levels towards learning [43]. Furthermore, these results are supported by Tomlinson (2000; 2001) who mentioned that providing students with multiple options during study does not only help students to finish their task, but it also helps them to increase their motivation [23, 34].

Moreover, DLM engages students to interact and participate in the class in richer ways. In fact, when the students are a part of teaching and deem them as a subject in learning rather than considering them as an object helps them in gaining motivation in all their learning [52]. Consequently, students learn effectively and become more triumphal [39].

Moreover, DLM gives students a range of ways to access information. When different methods are used during teaching, teachers will have no issue to reach diverse learners and capture students' interest for the sake of motivating them towards learning in an easy way such as using the computer, PowerPoint, pictures, and drawings [53, 54]. Finally, several studies conducted in Malaysia have reported that by using appropriate methods for teaching AL can help students to be more motivated and achieve better results in AL [6, 12, 16, 19, 21, 25].

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of the findings, it can be concluded that DLM is an effective method for teaching and learning AL as a foreign language. DLM had improved the secondary school students' motivation towards learning AL. Using DLM helped students to learn better while being motivated and interested compared to TCM. Consequently, this study strongly indicates that using DLM promotes better learning. In addition, this study suggests that DLM is an effective and exemplary method of teaching which can be integrated into the Malaysian secondary school curriculum for teaching the Arabic Language.

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